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RESPONSE: A STUDY OF THE GENESIS,  
NATURE, AND MEANING OF THE AURAL IMAGERY IN  
HENRY VAUGHAN'S SILEX SCINTILLANS

BY

LAVONNE NIKLASON


A thesis submitted  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree Master of Arts, Major in  
English, South Dakota  
State University

1968



RESPONSE: A STUDY OF THE GENESIS,  
NATURE, AND MEANING OF THE AURAL IMAGERY IN  
HENRY VAUGHAN'S SILEX SCINTILLANS

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Arts, and is acceptable as meeting the thesis requirements for this degree, but without implying that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

 Thesis Adviser

Date

~~Head~~, English Department

Date

26617

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M. L. N.

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## INTRODUCTION

The traditional symbols of the Christian life of prayer are readily discoverable in Silex Scintillans, the poetic record of one man's quest for God; they both constitute its deepest meaning and establish its proper context. It is, however, clear that the poet, Henry Vaughan, has embodied these universal symbols in patterns of his own arrangement. In this arrangement, the poetic imagery, which forms the patterns by which the symbolism is understood, is of exceptional importance to his poems in its inspiration, structure, effect, and meaning.

The poet's individual vision, communicated by his imagery, encompasses a world of marked Christian contrasts: the wonder of daybreak is contrasted with the mystery of night; the "quick" world with its affirmation of revival and resurrection is contrasted with the world of sleep and death; and the world of his native Breconshire landscape is contrasted with reminiscences of the Scriptural Garden of Eden. The poetic images of these contrasts combine to communicate in a unique way the symbolism of the poet's spiritual experience.

Although in recent years several important studies have dealt with Vaughan's imagery, the authors have concentrated on his visual and have practically ignored the aural imagery. It will appear that this aural imagery is focal to a full

understanding of Vaughan's religious verse in that it adds meaning which is not conveyed by the visual image alone. It is my purpose, therefore, to examine Vaughan's use of aural imagery in Silex Scintillans, the volume of religious poetry recognized as his most notable achievement, and thus to point the way to an appreciation of the part that aural imagery played in his poetic technique. Incidentally, by this means, we may come to appreciate one of the ways in which Vaughan is different from other poets of his time.

Such a study requires, basically, a review of pertinent earlier criticism as well as a clear definition of my consequent use of the literary term imagery particularly in its relation to Vaughan's technique within the context of the metaphysical style. Chapter One will be concerned, therefore, with these two basic areas of preliminary investigation.

Chapter Two will serve to introduce the reader to the general character and unity of the poems contained in Silex Scintillans. Although its 129 mainly short poems are divided into two groups that were separated by five years in publication, it is essential that the unity of the poems be recognized, for the meaning of the single aural image is largely dependent upon its relation to other images that recur throughout the volume. This chapter will examine as well the personal experiences of the poet which formed the sensibility that suggested his aural images, the poetic

tradition that governed his technique, and the prevailing temper of his times that helped shape the underlying attitudes expressed in his imagery.

Chapter Three will examine the specific aural images and establish that they contribute significantly to conveying the spiritual experience recorded in Silex Scintillans. Vaughan sought in the concrete manifestations of nature the answer to what he envisioned as man's predicament, and he saw in the harmony and order of the natural universe a contrast to man's restless willful nature. It is my belief that the aural imagery is often a determining poetic device in conveying the poet's conclusions drawn from experience to the reader.

Chapter Four will illustrate and summarize the findings of the previous chapter by means of a thorough study of Vaughan's technique in three poems that are representative of the aural imagery used throughout Silex Scintillans: "The Morning-watch," "The Night," and "Regeneration."

## CHAPTER ONE

## PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Two preliminary areas of investigation are basic to the argument of my paper. The first involves a review of pertinent earlier criticism of the poet and his work and the second the establishment of the definition and function of imagery in Vaughan's religious poetry.

Of the earlier criticism of Silex Scintillans this study needs be concerned with only two areas: that which treats of the poet's conversion and that which considers his approach to nature. It is necessary to establish that Vaughan experienced a spiritual, rather than a purely literary, transformation in order to understand the intrinsic meaning of his poetic images, many of which are derived from the phenomena of the natural world.

Critics of the body of Vaughan's poetry have long been aware of a marked contrast between Silex Scintillans and his earlier work. Though his secular verse contains many of the same images found in Silex Scintillans, they function as merely ornamental devices. The streams of Olor Iscanus are "bubbling" or "chiding" springs, but they serve only to adorn a poet's "Elysium";<sup>1</sup> the "rose-bud . . . sprung to bow

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<sup>1</sup>The Works of Henry Vaughan, ed. L. C. Martin, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 39. Quotations from Vaughan in my text are from Martin, hereafter cited as Works.

to heedless tempests"<sup>2</sup> simply describes Lady Elizabeth, the daughter of James I; and the poet hears the "noise" of war but because he wants to dismiss thoughts of this "ridiculous miserie," he writes an invitation in verse to a friend to visit at "his fireside" to "peace and mirth discusse."<sup>3</sup> Essentially it is these same visual and aural images that appear in the religious poetry; but instead of being sentimental or merely idyllic, they have been transformed into meaningful, compelling symbols. Vaughan found that the world of his private imagination was peculiarly suited to the expression of the great Christian opposites, and much of its imagery was readily translatable into spiritual metaphor and symbol. Religion was the key that unlocked this world; it also enriched it and to some extent ordered it into coherence; but, even more importantly, it likewise transformed the images into metaphorical expressions of Vaughan's spiritual experience. For the first time in his life, he had something to say for himself as a poet.

In attempting to explain this change in the character of Vaughan's poetry, many external forces in his life have been named by one critic or another as an impetus in Vaughan's turning from the mainly trivial external concerns of his

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<sup>2</sup>Works, p. 63.

<sup>3</sup>Works, p. 46.



Poems (1646) and his Olor Iscanus (1651)<sup>4</sup> to the essentially religious expression of Silex Scintillans. Although in the last decades of the nineteenth century Vaughan's "long illness" and the death of his young wife had assumed a place in discussions of his conversion, these causes of his change were considered ancillary to the main fact that he was influenced by reading The Temple of George Herbert. For example, in 1896, H. C. Beeching, while warning against exaggerating "the extent of Herbert's influence," is, nevertheless, prepared to acknowledge that "Vaughan owed to him his religious life, and so the practice of religious poetry."<sup>5</sup>

In fact, the early commentators seemed never to tire of emphasizing Vaughan's indebtedness to Herbert. Although the influence of The Temple is still considered a paramount cause of the poet's conversion, his illness and the deaths of his wife, brother, and friends have been reconsidered as later critics sought other factors to which to attribute his changed outlook. Elizabeth Holmes added to the list of influences his reading of the Hermetic books,<sup>6</sup> and Helen White contributed the thesis that the consequent frustration

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<sup>4</sup>Although Olor Iscanus was not published until 1651, it was written prior to the first volume of Silex Scintillans (1650). The dedication to Lord Kildare Digby dated 17 December 1647 indicates that the poems were completed.

<sup>5</sup>Canon H. C. Beeching, "Introduction," Poems of Henry Vaughan, ed. E. K. Chambers (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., n.d.), I, xli.

<sup>6</sup>Elizabeth Holmes, Henry Vaughan and the Hermetic Philosophy (Oxford: University Press, 1932), p. 17.

of his "London hopes" by the defeat of the Royalist cause precipitated his withdrawal from a disappointing world.<sup>7</sup> In the opinion of Joan Bennett, all Vaughan needed to make him "a poet who stands out from the contemporary galaxy of good versifiers" was "some central experience to which to relate his awareness of nature." His passionate concern with "the relation between God and the individual soul" gave significance to his observations of the created world.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, the only critic I have found who seeks to minimize the importance of Vaughan's religious conversion and, consequently, to diminish the difference between the sacred poetry and the earlier secular verse is E. L. Marilla. Even he does not deny a change in the poet but argues that the body of secular verse in Olor Iscanus contains "passages revealing strong moral convictions and deep concern about the current political and ecclesiastical turmoil." The point he wished to establish was that the 1650 edition of Silex Scintillans is not really different from the Poems and Olor Iscanus but only "a logical sequence of Vaughan's increasing seriousness as revealed in the secular verse." He stressed the poet's need for "spiritual consolation" in the troubled

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<sup>7</sup>Helen C. White, The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in Religious Experience (New York: Collier Books, 1966), p. 252.

<sup>8</sup>Joan Bennett, Four Metaphysical Poets: Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, and Crashaw (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), p. 75.

Civil War period and its consequent personal disillusionment.<sup>9</sup>

This contention seems to me to be misleading. I do not object to the assertion that Silex Scintillans reflects Vaughan's "increasing seriousness," but I do object to Marilla's conception that this seriousness is merely a poetic "mood," expedient for the moment, that might vanish after his disappointment subsides. One need only read the poet on his own terms to discover that the nature of his experience is an all-encompassing and enduring one. The Preface to the enlarged edition of his poems (1655) reflects, in the poet's own words, the firm resolution and the steady conviction of his calling. Further, the poetry, too, iterates his desire to write "true, unfeigned verse."<sup>10</sup>

For the most part, then, critics have agreed in essence with Douglas Bush, who stated that "there is perhaps no more signal example than Vaughan's of spiritual and poetical rebirth."<sup>11</sup> While disagreeing in the prominence they give to the various causal factors contributing to his conversion, they affirm the facts that he did undergo a religious conversion and that it is reflected in his poetry.

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<sup>9</sup>E. L. Marilla, "The Secular and Religious Poetry of Henry Vaughan," Modern Language Quarterly, IX (December, 1948), 394-411.

<sup>10</sup>Works, "Anguish," p. 526.

<sup>11</sup>Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600-1660 (Oxford: University Press, 1952), p. 144.

In addition to reviewing past criticism in order to establish the experiential nature of Vaughan's poetry, it is necessary to survey the changing critical opinion with regard to his response to nature in Silex Scintillans. Not only in the secular verse but in the sacred poetry as well, nature was the primary source of the visual as well as the aural imagery. The decorative function of this imagery in the secular verse led earlier critics to regard his sacred poetry as related essentially to the phenomenal world and its religious quality to be largely a consequence of his era. Gradually, however, critics began to realize that, whereas his secular verse is essentially literal, his sacred poetry is essentially symbolic. Neither the motive for nor the object of Vaughan's Silex Scintillans could be found in nature; instead the phenomena of nature supplied metaphors to convey the religious truths that had become paramount in his experience. Because I am concerned in this study with the necessity to meaning of the aural images the poet uses, it becomes important to establish that this imagery is not used merely for its descriptive enhancement but for the intrinsic meaning of the poetry.

It was not until almost two hundred years after its first publication that Henry Vaughan's poetry was made readily available to modern readers. Even then, in the preface to this first reprinting of his poetry, Lyte makes little of the poet's use of natural imagery except to say that

"his beloved Usk, and the beautiful vale through which it flows . . . probably afforded him many a poetic ramble."<sup>12</sup> Other nineteenth century commentaries, similar to Lyte's in their vagueness, can hardly afford the modern reader any insight into this aspect of his poetry. In general, the imagery was considered descriptively picturesque or fanciful, and the religion pantheistically mystical. Grosart, one of these earlier critics, links Vaughan with Shelley in the former respect and with Wordsworth in the latter.<sup>13</sup>

By the time of the first World War, the conception of Vaughan as a mystical nature poet had attained prominence; each new commentator in the first few decades of the twentieth century tended to reword the view of his predecessors, while only rarely venturing an interpretive opinion of his own. Vaughan was seen as an early romantic in his approach to nature and as a "lineal progenitor of Wordsworth."<sup>14</sup> It was not until the 1930's that it became apparent to a few critics that generalizations would not suffice to explain his peculiar affinity to nature. George Williamson, with

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<sup>12</sup>Rev. H. F. Lyte, "Memoir" to Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations of Henry Vaughan (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1856), p. 27.

<sup>13</sup>A. B. Grosart, ed., The Works in Verse and Prose Complete of Henry Vaughan (Lancashire: The Muses Library, 1871), I, xx.

<sup>14</sup>William Empson, "An Early Romantic," The Cambridge Review, XXXI (1929), 495.

more perception than his predecessors, found that

In Henry Vaughan mysticism turns to Nature and finds there its metaphysical imagery and its inspiration. Through his sympathy with Nature the conceit annexes another great domain of symbolism, for Vaughan made Nature his special province and explored its riches with peculiar insight.<sup>15</sup>

Such acumen pointed the way. Most subsequent critics of Vaughan found occasion to remark upon his responsiveness to nature, but it has been the critics of the last ten years who have emphasized the fact that his imagery derived from the phenomena of nature carries the intrinsic meaning of the poem rather than being largely ornamental in function. "Very seldom is any natural phenomenon, any moment of nature, viewed in its own literal light."<sup>16</sup> Most often, the image derived from nature is understood to have been to Vaughan only an illustration of a Scriptural truth, "a system of divine hieroglyphs."<sup>17</sup> E. C. Pettet, a critic of our decade, noted that "Nature enters his lyrics chiefly through metaphor and illustration."<sup>18</sup> R. H. Walters contended that in "unbowel'd nature, he was seeking moral lessons, parables for

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<sup>15</sup>George Williamson, The Donne Tradition (Cambridge: University Press, 1930), pp. 132-133.

<sup>16</sup>White, p. 284.

<sup>17</sup>J. B. Leishman, The Metaphysical Poets: Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Traherne (Oxford: University Press, 1934), p. 158.

<sup>18</sup>E. C. Pettet, Of Paradise and Light: A Study of Vaughan's *Silex Scintillans* (Cambridge, Eng: University Press, 1960), p. 87.

man's spiritual welfare."<sup>19</sup>

Particularly have the critics of the last ten years dealt extensively with the poet's use of natural symbolism as it underlies the expression of his religious experience. In order to establish that the poet used nature to convey an essentially Christian experience, they have probed deeper into basic philosophical attitudes, and, in so doing, have minimized the manifold criticism that has centered around Vaughan's Hermetic symbolism.

Ross Garner is one such critic who in defining the basic philosophic attitudes underlying Vaughan's expression of experience believes that it is entirely possible to absorb the Hermetic into the Christian tradition. He finds that these attitudes

rest in the Alexandrian resolution of the immanence-transcendence dichotomy, the Augustinian notion of total depravity, and the allegorical habit of mind which feels in the created universe the uncreated universe beyond.<sup>20</sup>

Vaughan did draw substantially from the Hermetic philosophy in its insistence on revelation<sup>21</sup> in opposition to reason and in its conception of the entire cosmos as alive,

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<sup>19</sup>R. H. Walters, "Henry Vaughan and the Alchemists," Review of English Studies, XXIII (April, 1947), 120.

<sup>20</sup>Ross Garner, Henry Vaughan: Experience and the Tradition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 162.

<sup>21</sup>Garner, p. 65. The notion that knowledge must be revealed carried with it the idea that revelation happened only to certain specifically favored or endowed persons; hence, the elite assumed the aura of a cult in Hermeticism.



a magnetically unified whole; but he adapts and uses the tenets of this occult philosophy, not for its independent validity but to illustrate and illuminate Christian ideas. Hermeticism was attractive to the seventeenth-century English mind. "Donne was fascinated by it, and the literature of the time is filled with references to 'signature', 'elixirs', 'essences', 'influences', etc."<sup>22</sup> Vaughan was no exception, but critics have particularly singled him out for comment because his twin brother Thomas was one of the leading exponents of Hermeticism. Only the manner in which Vaughan adapted the tenets of this philosophy to illustrate his Christian experience is applicable to my study; and, as a critic of our decade has concluded, "there is a close fusion of Hermetic and Christian ideas."<sup>23</sup>

Pettet's chief contribution to my study, however, is in his careful tracing of the complex and constantly recurring visual images as he supported in substance the critical view that sees these natural images as symbolic. R. A. Durr, too, in his analysis of the three major metaphors that occur in Vaughan's poetry, confirmed Pettet's opinion by his detailed tracing of the natural imagery, describing it as the metaphor of "God's seed growing secretly."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Garner, p. 62.

<sup>23</sup>Pettet, p. 85.

<sup>24</sup>R. A. Durr, On the Mystical Poetry of Henry Vaughan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 30.



To summarize, then, criticism pertinent to my study lies in two areas. The first of these centers around the spiritual conversion that turned the thinking of this poet from secular to religious channels. For the most part, the critics affirm that a transformation of the poet is revealed in Silex Scintillans, and disagree primarily in the prominence each gives to the various external factors contributory to his conversion. Clearly, we can accept, then, that his sacred poetry is experiential and had its basis in Vaughan's own personal life.

The other area of criticism that has been reviewed concerns the poet's response to the natural world, one of the primary sources of his imagery. Opinion has changed in this regard from that of the earlier critics, who saw Vaughan's natural images as essentially descriptive, to that of the present-day critics, who regard them as metaphorical and illustrative poetic devices that convey the basic meaning of his religious experience.

Next, because this study is concerned with aural imagery, it is necessary that the general function of imagery in poetry be established and, further, that certain ambiguities in the definition of the term be eliminated.

As communication through the medium of language, poetry, in the words of Matthew Arnold, "has the power of so dealing with things as to awaken in us a wonderfully full, new, and intimate sense of them." Underlying this effect on the

reader is the essential doubleness that exists in the poetic creation itself. The poet has a twofold nature, as a man and as an artist. His creation, consequently, springs from a twofold source -- a mysterious inner compulsion to communicate his experience and a fully conscious technical discipline.

The poetic image arises out of this dual nature of the poet, and becomes through the medium of language a tangible technical expression of the poet's emotion. It represents the common counter of experience between the poet and the reader as it awakens in the reader a heightened awareness of sense, emotion, and thought. As the poet turns the material of living into a verbal design, feeling and thought are enhanced by the rhythmical patterns of words in the right order, but the interpretive communication of the poem lies in the image. It joins the poet's and the reader's experience as it initiates a new experience. The poet's meaning needs no statement in abstract language. Wordsworth tells us about the daffodils in order to tell us something about himself. The realistic images of the flowers, the trees, the waves, and the wind intuitively communicate to the emotions and sensations of the reader. The associations and relationships that these images establish in the reader's mind suggest all the ideas behind the words.

In its application in modern criticism, however, the technical term imagery often carries a stereotyped meaning.

Most people, almost subconsciously, think of a visual reproduction only. This definition is too limited. The term image is not restricted in its application to a description of a visual sensation, but applies to any or all of the five senses. Imagery is just as validly -- though less frequently -- aural as visual. An aural image includes any single word, phrase, or sentence that would normally evoke in the reader's mind a recollection of sound or absence of sound. Moreover, words denoting absence of sound are fully as important as those denoting its presence. Just as Vaughan obviously relies on visual contrast to enhance and convey his poetic message in the images of light and darkness so does he contrast sound and silence.

Further, two particular senses of the term imagery are used in modern criticism. In the one, imagery is used to signify descriptive passages in poetry with the image to be understood in its literal meaning. Tennyson, for example, appeals to the senses of smell and hearing, as well as sight, in the lines:

And many a rose-carnation feeds  
With summer spice the humming air.

More commonly, however, imagery is used to signify figurative language, especially metaphors and similes, in which the words used convey more than their literal meaning.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York: Rinehart & Co., Inc., 1957), p. 36.

These figurative images arise out of the poet's intuitive perception of similarities between dissimilar things, and they constitute a significant part that imagination plays in the conception of the poem. In their very simplest form, figurative images are sensuous; they reveal external similarities which stimulate the senses freshly and pleasurably. When Shakespeare describes bees as "the singing masons building roofs of gold," the reader sees and hears the bees more intensely, but the stimulation does not go beyond the senses. Imagery contributes most to the poem, however, when the mind or emotion, or both, are fused with the sensuous image. When Henry Vaughan identifies the lingering light of early evening with the effect on his mind of the memory of the dead, he condenses into the image both the sensuous beauty of the fading sunset and the mental suggestion of the lingering memory of departed friends:

It glows and glitters in my cloudy brest  
Like stars upon some gloomy grove  
Or those faint beams in which this hill is drest,  
After the Sun's remove.<sup>26</sup>

The passage just quoted typifies Vaughan's characteristic use of imagery. His poetry leaves the reader with a distinctive landscape of the native Breconshire countryside where the poet spent the greater part of his life, but the images of sunlight, of frequent groves and bowers, of lively waterfalls and "vocal" streams, of native flowers, and of

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<sup>26</sup>Works, "They are all gone into the world of light," p. 483.

the numerous wild birds and their songs are seldom used only for their sensuous appeal. The images become, instead, metaphorical expressions of his experience. His concept of nature is a highly idealized one, and its imagery is chosen primarily to reveal Scriptural truths. On the whole, his painting of nature is neither rich nor especially stimulating in sensuous impression.

Vaughan's peculiar technique in the use of imagery is a natural development from the literary movements of his time. The metaphysical poets had reacted against the Petrarchan extravagances of the poets of the preceding Elizabethan age. Instead of choosing images mainly to adorn the poetry with their sensuous and emotional appeal as many of the Elizabethan poets had, Vaughan and his fellow metaphysicists selected images for their logical relation to thought. The enlightened scientific and spiritually oriented Jacobean age with its accompanying attitudes of skepticism, introspection, and self-consciousness saw a different use for poetic imagery from that of the expansive and idealistic Elizabethan era. The images the metaphysicists chose became a vehicle for the expression of their thought.

John Donne and the poets most commonly named metaphysicists -- George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, and Vaughan -- searched for the intellectual equivalents of emotion in their

images.<sup>27</sup> For instance, when Donne cries out to his weeping mistress in "A Valediction of Weeping," "O more than Moon, / Draw not up seas to drown me in thy sphere," the image tends to expand the more we contemplate it. His mistress is "more than Moon" not only because she is more fair but because she draws the poet to her more powerfully than the moon draws the tide; because she draws up tears as the moon will draw up the seas on which the poet is about to voyage; because her tears are salt like the seas, and because like the seas they may destroy him. All this and more is encompassed within the image. Donne's reader must be capable not only of feeling but of thinking at the same time. His imagery reflects the range of his intellectual explorations, from his interest in the old astronomical theories to the latest geographical explorations.

Although Vaughan's intellectual sensibility does not approach Donne's, he brought a new range of experience within the compass of the metaphysical style. No one else among Donne's followers had watched the green things of the earth, the sky and water, the birds and the flowers with the same emotions as he had. In the familiar world of nature within the orbit of his daily experience, Vaughan found the primary source of his imagery, but it was because he had assimilated and adapted the metaphysical manner of Herbert, which Herbert

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<sup>27</sup>Herbert J. C. Grierson, "Introduction," Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. xv.

in turn had learned from Donne, that he was able to connect the familiar phenomena of the temporal world to his conceptions of life, death, time, and eternity. When the poet writes of "Bright shootes of everlastingnesse,"<sup>28</sup> the reader not only recalls the plant imagery that forms an important part of his sensibility but realizes that Vaughan is tying the image to a mental concept. The green shoots of the plant are paralleled in the poet's mind to early childhood, when man is closer to his pre-existent soul. Vaughan is using the Platonic concept of the soul's pre-existence together with the plant imagery to reveal that it is in the innocence of childhood, before exposure to the contaminating influences of flesh, that mankind is closest to God.<sup>29</sup> The phrase might be termed an intellectual conceit, the amalgamation of disparate experience to express analogous thought, an important characteristic of the metaphysical style. The reader must not only visualize but also think in order to equate the "Bright shootes" of the plant with childhood and the "everlastingnesse" with the Platonic conception of the soul's pre-existence. The metaphysical poet intended his oftentimes startling images to induce thought.

Vaughan emerged from his contact with the metaphysical

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<sup>28</sup>Works, "The Retreate," p. 419.

<sup>29</sup>Merritt Y. Hughes, "The Theme of Pre-Existence and Infancy in 'The Retreate'," Philological Quarterly, XX (July, 1941), p. 499.

poets with the ability to correlate his experiences in the same technical manner they had employed. When he began to explore his religious belief, he found that it centered in his conception of nature. From being merely ornamental or illustrative, as they were in his secular poetry, the images that reflected his perceptiveness of nature became the intellectual core of his poetry. After his religious conversion, he had achieved a sense of direction and become capable of correlating his awareness of the physical world to his religious expression. This new awareness constantly affects his choice and use of imagery. And not only is he the loving observer of the sights of nature but he is acutely aware of its sounds as well. The aural response to their Creator of even the meanest of creatures signified to Vaughan the oneness and unity of creation. To him the sounds of running water, the song of a bird, the silent, ordered motion of the stars meant that the world was "in tune" and exemplified nature's adoration and praise to the One who had first made the world. There was nothing passive anywhere in the universe. The least of the creatures contained the eloquent presence of God, and each of them, sentient, radiant with that Presence, gave its message to the wistful and homesick soul of man.

Much of his aural imagery, then, arises out of Vaughan's awareness of nature as the fulfillment of God's will. Related but in sharp contrast to this imagery are the aural



images that portray restless, straying man. Man, unlike nature, does not fulfill the law of his being. Endowed with will and reason, he often follows the "pomp" and the "noise of the broad way," the distracting influences of the world of the flesh. It is this human condition that Vaughan views as a distinct handicap and expresses in much of his aural imagery.

Man can learn from obedient, responsive nature, but in order to do so, he must turn away from the "noise" of the flesh and find God again in the quiet contemplation of His book, Nature. Man can do nothing to achieve salvation on his own accord; he can only be silently receptive to His inscrutable will. By shutting out the distractions of the flesh, man becomes the silent receptacle for the influx of His grace. The emphasis on silence becomes an important part of the poet's aural imagery as he surcharges even absence of sound with significant meaning.

Vaughan's poetry, then, can be likened to that of the other metaphysical poets with which he is ordinarily categorized in that their imagery arises out of an intent to communicate their emotional expression by an intellectual parallel. Their images were seldom selected for their sensuous appeal, but applied in order to advance thought. Unlike the other metaphysicists, Vaughan chose his images mainly from the world of nature, and he used them as evidence of a Divine plan in creation that should have meaning for disorderly

man. All man needed was an observing eye and an attendant ear to see and hear that nature in its obedience and response was an integral One with its Source, whereas man in his essential willfulness strayed from this natural plan.

Not only is Vaughan unique among the metaphysicals in his use of nature as the predominant source of his imagery, he is also different from them in placing dependence on aural, as well as visual, imagery. The aural image will sometimes work in conjunction with the visual to convey meaning; but often it stands alone as the metaphorical expression of the poet's thoughts.

Comparison of Vaughan's technique in employing imagery with that of George Herbert, a fellow metaphysical poet, will help illustrate the unique relation of the aural image to the visual in Vaughan. Because Herbert is almost wholly concerned with contemplating God in the forms, regulations, and customs of the church and Vaughan's religious belief centers in his conception of nature, the images each uses differ considerably. Moreover, although Vaughan gave Herbert credit for his initial impetus to write sacred verse, and borrowed titles, opening lines, and whole phrases from his self-acknowledged master, their poetic technique with regard to their use of imagery also differs.

The emblematic quality of Herbert's poems is readily apparent in the visual imagery. In fact, the visual image in complete fusion with its moral significance forms the

basis for many of his poems. Consider, for example, the visual image Herbert creates in "The Church-floore," where the firmness and strength suggested in the marble floor is fused completely to its moral import:

Mark you the floore? that square & speckled stone,  
Which looks so firm and strong,  
Is Patience.

The fusion of image and idea is what might be called a "bodied" idea, a form of expression in which the image and its significance are completely coextensive with each other. Herbert can rely, therefore, almost wholly on the visual nature of imagery, just as did the emblem books of the time. His poetry brings its picture with it. It remains primarily visual; but the images presented have already been explored, and when they enter the poem, they enter it with their implications already worked out.

Vaughan, on the other hand, in order to reveal more fully the totality of his religious experience, builds thematic image clusters that become symbols of his experience. The aural image is an important part of the thematic image cluster, but it does not by itself convey the total implicit meaning behind the image cluster.

For example, the plant, from its beginning seed to the blossoming flower, is a common visual image in Vaughan's poetry; it provides a good example of his technique. A passage in Vaughan's devotional prose work, Mount of Olives (1652) is explicatory of the symbolic range of meaning

implicit in this image:

O thou most mild and merciful Lamb of God! the onely,  
and the Almighty sower! grant, I beseech thee, that  
the seed which falls this day upon my heart, may never  
be choak'd with the Cares of this world, nor be devoured  
by the fowles of the aire, nor wither away in these  
times of persecution and triall: but so Cherish it with  
the Dew of thy divine spirit, that (as in a good and  
faithful ground) it may bring forth fruit unto eternal  
life, to the glory of thy great name, and the Comfort  
of my poor soul, which thou has bought with thy most  
precious and saving blood.<sup>30</sup>

The entire complex of imagery in Silex Scintillans that  
unites with the pervasive plant image reveals Vaughan's  
method of employing imagery to achieve the range of meaning  
he intends.<sup>31</sup> The primal seed of divinity inalienable to  
man's soul lies dormant but green like the seed of the plant.  
It is "nurst below tempests and windes" where it thrives  
"unseen and dumb," a silent receptacle for God's nourishing  
"dew." Its growth is dependent upon the periodic showers of  
grace, the "souls bright food," without which life "is loose  
and spills." Above ground, the plant, unlike its secret  
underground seed, is exposed to all of the adverse climatic  
conditions that may hinder its growth. Storms and tempests  
"blast this sully'd flowre," robbing it of its "youth and

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<sup>30</sup>Works, p. 149.

<sup>31</sup>The metaphor of the plant and its attendant imagery  
is most conspicuously apparent in the following poems: "The  
Seed growing secretly," p. 510; "The Match," p. 434; "Dis-  
order and frailty," p. 465; "The Sap," p. 475; "The Morning-  
watch," p. 424; "Mans fall, and Recovery," p. 411; "Unprofit-  
ableness," p. 441; "Love and Discipline," p. 464; "Rules  
and Lessons," p. 436; and "Regeneration," p. 397.

beauty," frosts "nip and molest" it, and weeds often choke its growth. Adverse conditions are as inevitable for man, open to all of the contaminating influences of temporal existence, as they are for the exposed plant. The warmth of the sun returns, however, to revitalize the plant; and as the plant "opens to the Ray," it blossoms and stretches toward heaven.

The imagery of the "growth of the lily" from the seed to the blossoming flower forms Vaughan's central symbol of the deep religious life he lived. Its symbolism is not wholly apparent in one image or within the compass of one poem because Vaughan compounds his metaphors by adding new images and, consequently, additional nuances of meaning; and, in this whole thematic cluster, the aural image holds a significant place. The silence of the secret underground growth and the storms and tempests that assault the exposed plant constitute an important part of the meaning of the plant metaphor which Vaughan has expanded and developed into a symbol.

Whereas Vaughan's images are metaphorical expressions that attain to the wider province of the symbol, Herbert's remain emblems where the visual image and the philosophical moralizing are completely fused in the entity of the single poem. There is no necessary and essential resemblance between the church floor and the quality of patience. The likenesses are rarely inherent in the imagery. They need not

be, for Herbert creates the likenesses for the reader, and by the end of the poem, the reader always understands and accepts them.

Vaughan, on the other hand, begins with more conventional images, but his technique involves exploring their significance and building upon them, thus enlarging their scope and their consequent meaning. As a result, he depends more extensively on aural images for meaning in the total thematic image cluster that has become symbolic of his thought.

Moreover, another conspicuous difference between the two poets arises out of this symbolic nature of Vaughan's imagery. Because the total significance of the image is not explored within a single poem but relates and transfers over into other poems thus making these images dependent on one another for the full meaning of the symbol, Vaughan is able to use contrast effectively to enhance his entire work. In the visual imagery this contrast is readily apparent in the antithesis of light and darkness, but it extends to the aural imagery as well. The noisy world of man is contrasted with the comparative quiet of the beauty of religion manifested in the "quiet shades" of the grove or in the noiseless order of the heavenly bodies. The distracted bustlings of the "worldling" are contrasted with the serenity and peace of the contemplative man. The harmonious "consort" of natural creation is contrasted with the discord of willful man.

This contrast is totally lacking in Herbert's verse, largely because he does not depend upon an objective portrayal of imagery for effect, but integrates it with his own subjective moralizing, which is usually confined to the entity of each poem.

By comparing Herbert's technique of employing imagery in The Temple with Vaughan's in Silex Scintillans, it becomes easier to understand Vaughan's unique method of using aural imagery. By itself, the aural image conveys meaning that could not be discovered without it; but in order to understand the total meaning of Silex Scintillans, much of the aural imagery must be traced in its interrelationship with the visual imagery, as well as against the background of contrast in the whole poetic work.

## CHAPTER TWO

## PHYSICAL, SOCIAL, AND INTELLECTUAL MILIEU

Silex Scintillans, the religious poetry on which Vaughan's fame rest, is essentially a poetic work, not a collection of miscellaneous lyrics. It makes its most profound impact as a whole, for as the poet's highly individualized images combine to convey its spiritual experience, they reveal a distinctive world within the poet's immediate personal life and reflect the social and intellectual milieu of his century.

Although Vaughan's awareness of nature was apparent in his earlier secular verse, it had not as yet been correlated with a meaningful purpose. The stars and streams of Poems (1646) and of Olor Iscanus (1651) are the same stars and streams of his later, sacred verse; but, whereas in the secular verse the poet had looked round for a subject they could adorn and contented himself with partial relevance, these same images appear in Silex Scintillans in the terms in which he is thinking. The intensely personal and meaningful poetry of its two editions is the result of the integration of the poet's unique sensibility and his resolute purpose.

As noted earlier, critics of Vaughan have disagreed on the prominence they give to the specific causal factors that combined to give the poet of Silex Scintillans the serious purpose lacking in his earlier poetry; but they have agreed,



almost without exception, that a definite spiritual experience is reflected in its 129 lyrics. Vaughan, moreover, explained his spiritual regeneration in the introductions to the two editions of his sacred poetry, and the poetry verified his statements perhaps better than any critical comment could.

The first edition of Silex Scintillans: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations, published in 1650, contained seventy-three lyrics introduced by an engraved title page "presenting the emblem of the Flashing Flint."<sup>1</sup> The picture, in the emblematic mode, is of a stony human heart weeping, bleeding, and flaming. Above the heart is the hand of God extending from the clouds and wielding a steel dagger that has just struck the "flinty" heart. A poem in Latin, "Authoris (de se) Emblema," explained the picture. Louis Martz has translated the poem literally:

You have often touched me, I confess, without a wound, and your Voice, without a voice, has often sought to counsel me; your diviner breath has encompassed me with its calm motion, and in vain has cautioned me with its sacred murmur. I was deaf and dumb: a Flint: You (how great care you take of your own!) try to revive another way, you change the Remedy; and now angered you say that Love has no power, and you prepare to conquer force with Force, you come closer, you break through the Rocky barrier of my heart, and it is made Flesh that was before a Stone. Behold me torn asunder! and at last the Fragments burning toward your skies, and the cheeks streaming with tears out of the Adamant. Thus once upon

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<sup>1</sup>Louis L. Martz, The Paradise Within: Studies in Vaughan, Traherne, and Milton (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 5.

a time you made the Rocks flow and the Crags gush,  
 oh ever provident of your people! How marvellous  
 toward me is your hand! In Dying, I have been born  
 again; and in the midst of my shattered means I  
 am now richer.<sup>2</sup>

The explanatory poem together with the picture established the general character of the poems that followed. The sentiment Vaughan expressed here reverberated throughout Silex Scintillans as his poetry recorded his personal quest for regeneration.

In 1655 a second, enlarged edition appeared. It included the seventy-three poems of the previous edition plus an additional fifty-six. The engraved title page bearing the emblem and the accompanying explanatory poem were omitted; and, in their place, a title page again reading Silex Scintillans: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations announced this second edition. In a dedicatory poem, the first stanza of which had appeared in the previous edition, Vaughan offered "these thy deaths fruits" to the "Holy and Just one, Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, and the sacred Virgin Mary."<sup>3</sup> A prose "Authors Preface to the following Hymns," together with a twelve-line poem, was added to the introductory matter. In the preface and in the poem, Vaughan admonished the "wits" who sensually wallow in "impure thoughts and scurrilous conceits" in a vain attempt to be considered

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<sup>2</sup>Martz, pp. 5-6.

<sup>3</sup>Works, p. 594.

poets of repute. He confessed that he himself had for "many years together, languished of this very sickness; and it is no long time since I have recovered." He credited his diversion from the "foul and overflowing stream" to "the blessed man, Mr. George Herbert, whose holy life and verse gained many pious Converts, (of Whom I am the least) and gave the first check to a most flourishing and admired wit of his time." In the preface, too, Vaughan admitted that he was "nigh unto death, and am still at no great distance from it,"<sup>4</sup> thus establishing the evidence from which critics would later deduce the poet's physical or mental breakdown.

These three elements, then -- engraved title page, its accompanying confession, and the Herbertian dedication -- form a descriptive preface to the 129 devotional poems that comprise Silex Scintillans and present ample evidence that the poet had experienced the spiritual change that is reflected in the poetry.

Though it consists mainly of short poems and is divided into two parts that were separated by five years in publication, Silex Scintillans is essentially a single poetic work; it is more meaningful viewed as a whole because throughout the volume Vaughan was exploring the meaning of an experience of sudden illumination. Particularly from the standpoint of its imagery, it is important that the reader consider the poetry as a unified whole. The meaning of the

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<sup>4</sup>Works, pp. 383-392.

single image cannot be fully understood in isolation but must be comprehended as a part of a much broader image cluster which, in its cumulative effect, unveils the distinctive "world" within Vaughan's imagination.

One obvious reason for the unity of Silex Scintillans lies in the continuous and predominantly devotional nature of the poems; another in the fact that its poems clearly fall into a small number of groups. The majority of them relate Vaughan's own spiritual progress. About one-third (roughly forty) deal, in terms of Christian doctrine, directly with the relationship of the poet's will to the transcendental world, which is the engrossing object of his thought. These poems express the poet's anguish, longing, and love as he meditates on his self-weakness, his sin, and his own inadequacy. The second most numerous group (roughly thirty) includes the poems inspired by specific tenets of Christian doctrine regarding death -- judgment, resurrection, and immortality. Almost as many poems (roughly twenty-five) find in natural objects and phenomena the workings of the Spirit of God. Together, the three groups comprise approximately five-sevenths of the whole and certainly account in large measure for the total effect of this body of sacred verse. The remaining poems are concerned with specific days of the church calendar and service, with events in the life of Christ, and with biblical characters and objects. The

categories mentioned above are not mutually exclusive, however, for all of the poems are closely interrelated by variations on a limited number of themes.

Three recurring motifs are prominent in Silex Scintillans, and, in their pervasiveness, serve as an additional unifying device. The first of these themes is that of the spiritual exile and estrangement of man from God. This feeling of separation leads to a series of pessimistic expressions of the human predicament. The human body is seen as a prison for the soul; life is viewed as an exile of the pilgrim from his heavenly home. The poetry here reveals the strongest convictions of the perversity, blindness, and instability of the "mule, unruly man."

The second recurring theme is closely related to the first that sees temporal life as an imprisonment and an exile; in this perspective, Vaughan establishes that it is only through the death of the Old Adam of sin in each man that a spiritual transformation can occur. This outlook implies a withdrawal from the contentious world and its distractions back to that spiritual condition wherein man knows himself to be in the image and likeness of God. In the "soul's search for this pure and original state,"<sup>5</sup> Vaughan often looks back nostalgically to childhood or

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<sup>5</sup>Bain Tate Stewart, "The Meaning of Silex Scintillans," Philological Quarterly, XXII (January, 1943), p. 80. Stewart contends that "the soul's search for its pure and original state" is Vaughan's whole poetic message.

envisions the pristine Garden of Eden. He goes even farther to imply that man can be wholly freed from sin only when he shed the "veil" of the body in death.

The third recurring motif, which is clearly optimistic in its outlook when compared to the pessimism of the other two, sees in all of natural creation the evidence of the glory and unity of God. Vaughan observes in the obedience, the order, and the stability of the natural universe, an essential emanation of all creation from one endless source. The First Mover is not only the original source from which all natural phenomena have sprung, but this original source still permeates all of the natural universe. Although the three constantly recurring themes tend to unify the individual poems into a whole, the reader is always aware of two opposed strands of feeling: loss of God and awareness of God's glory, the first implying separation from Him, and the second nearness to Him.<sup>6</sup>

The continuity and unity of Silex Scintillans arises in large part, then, from the fact that the individual lyrics are all of a devotional nature and are clearly divided into a small number of groups conveying three pervasive ideas. Essentially, these three themes record Vaughan's spiritual regeneration as he poignantly feels his estrangement from God, searches nature for the answer to man's predicament,

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<sup>6</sup>Garner, p. 10.

and turns finally to the realization that it is only in the death of the body to this world that he can be born again.

The basic unity and continuous nature of the poems in Silex Scintillans must be recognized before the reader can fully appreciate the meaning the images convey. The significance of his observations cannot be understood within the compass of one poem, for Vaughan depended upon the interrelationship of the images that further help bind the poems together for his full meaning.

As all poetic images derive from a perception of relation to past events, circumstance, and interests in the poet's life, a study of poetic imagery requires an examination of the poet's personal as well as cultural background in order to understand the various factors that constituted the particular sensibility revealed in the imagery.

Herbert's imagery, like Donne's before him, works through the mind rather than the senses, but because the range of Herbert's experience was restricted to the simpler life of the country parsonage whereas Donne's lively interest encompassed most of the subjects that excited the cultivated minds of the day, the range of Herbert's imagery is considerably narrower. In like manner, Vaughan's imagery has an intellectual basis but reflects a different set of interests from that of either the urban, sophisticated Donne or the country parson Herbert. Herbert, contemplating God in the

gospel story and in the forms and ceremonies of the church, had little to teach Vaughan about the relation between God and the created world because he seldom looked at the countryside. Vaughan, on the other hand, found his principal source of imagery there.

The Usk Valley in southwest Wales, which was Vaughan's home for all but a few years of his life, became an important influence, then, in Vaughan's experience; which will later be reflected in his poetic imagery. It was here in the Usk Valley near Newton that Henry Vaughan was born in 1621; after his Oxford education and a brief stay in London, it was to this valley that he returned in 1642 to live out his life; and it is in the neighboring parish of Llansantffraed that he lies buried.<sup>7</sup>

The Usk River, which flows through this fertile valley, Vaughan commemorated in the title of his principal volume of secular verse, Olor Iscanus, "The Swan of the Usk," and the river's many tributaries formed the streams that are encountered frequently in both his secular and sacred poetry. Vaughan loved the Usk<sup>8</sup> as Wordsworth did the Derwent. He enjoyed the numerous shaded groves of his native valley nestled in the shadows of the Brecon Beacons because they

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<sup>7</sup>Pettet, p. 86.

<sup>8</sup>Works, "The Waterfall," p. 537. Of the Usk Vaughan wrote: "Dear Stream! dear bank, where often I / Have Sate, and pleas'd my pensive eye."



afforded him the secluded solitude he had come to cherish in his mature years. Here he could listen for the songs of the numerous wild birds, for Llangorse Pool, less than two miles from his home, was the breeding ground of more wild birds than any other place in south Wales.<sup>9</sup> The innumerable aural as well as visual images that after the poet's conversion held a significant place in expressing his religious experience had their genesis in this "still singularly beautiful stretch of countryside."<sup>10</sup> The streams of his childhood became the "living waters" of Silex Scintillans, the shaded groves became the silent recesses for communion with God, and the songs of the birds became the harmonious response of nature to its Creator.

The environment in which Vaughan spent the greater part of his life is significant, too, in that it was here that he enjoyed the unhurried innocence of childhood, the calm and the quiet that became after his conversion a treasured state of mind. He always sought to return to that "age of mysteries," to that "dear, harmless age" of childhood in order to recapture the simplicity and innocence of an age unencumbered and unspoiled by the vexations and distractions of adult life:

Since all that age doth teach, is ill,  
Why should I not love childe-hood still?<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Rev. F. E. Hutchinson, Henry Vaughan: A Life and Interpretation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 23.

<sup>10</sup>Pettet, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup>Works, "Childe-hood," p. 529.

Vaughan would not have questioned Wordsworth's view of the influence of natural beauty upon the growing child. In the poem, "Looking back," he apostrophized the scenes of his infancy:

Fair, shining Mountains of my pilgrimage,  
And flow'ry Vales, whose flow'rs were stars:  
The days and nights of my first, happy age;  
An age without distaste and wars.<sup>12</sup>

The varied manifestations of natural life that he, perhaps, only partly perceived as a child remained with him to become, in more serious and mature years, an integral part of his poetic and religious viewpoint.

There is no evidence that Vaughan's college years contributed much to the development of his poetry. Although there is no record of his matriculation into Jesus College at Oxford, Anthony à Wood records Henry Vaughan as an Oxford man "not staying to take a degree."<sup>13</sup> After his university education, which it is assumed occupied about two years, Vaughan went to London, and the two years that he remained there marked his first acquaintance with the great world. These years were most important ones in the political history of England, and the critical events culminating in the Civil War left a lasting impression on the young poet's mind.

Vaughan arrived in London only months before the Long

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<sup>12</sup>Works, p. 640.

<sup>13</sup>Hutchinson, p. 30.

Parliament of 1640 assembled to give vent to the mounting opposition to the government in both Church and State. He was there in the later months of 1640 when Parliament began impeachment proceedings against Strafford and soon followed this action with proceedings to impeach Archbishop Laud, the High Commissioner of the Anglican Church to which Vaughan belonged. The following May, Strafford was executed on Tower Hill in assent to the threatening mob that "howled" outside Whitehall. The part played by the mob is described by Sir Philip Warwick:

And to shew how mad this whole People were especially in and about this then bloody and brutish City; in the evening of the days wherein he was executed, the greatest demonstrations of joy that possibly could be exprest ~~rann~~ thro' the whole Town and Countries hereabout; and many that came up to Town they went crying, 'His head is off! His head is off!', and in many places committing insolencies upon, and breaking the windows of those persons who would not solemnize this Festival with a bonfire. So ignorant and brutish is a multitude.<sup>14</sup>

Such violence left a lasting impression on the ardent young Royalist. His sense of man's blind acquiescence to mob rule and his increasing perversity, which underlie many of the aural images in Sillex Scintillans, could well have had their origin in the heightened religious and political tension the poet witnessed while in the English capital.

Although the influence of contemporary poets during Vaughan's stay in London cannot be considered as directly

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<sup>14</sup>As quoted by Hutchinson, pp. 41-42.

contributing to his aural imagery, his association with them should, nonetheless, be noted, for it quickened his desire to write poetry. His first published volume, Poems, contains evidence of his attraction to the congenial company of the "Sons of Ben" -- Cartwright, Cleveland, Davenant, and Habington. Particularly does "A Rhapsodis" describe reminiscences of his London days in their company.

Vaughan returned to his native Breconshire in 1642 to serve his neighbors and friends as the Welsh physician he came to be called and to write the sacred poetry of Silex Scintillans. The bitter defeat of Vaughan's political and religious affiliations in the Parliamentary victory in 1646 and its attendant personal consequences,<sup>15</sup> together with the death of his brother William in 1648 and his own illness, led him to seek spiritual consolation in the close study of the Bible and to find inspiration in The Temple of George Herbert. Silex Scintillans is the result, and these biographical facts enable us to understand something at least of the mystery of his sudden poetic flowering. They reveal that the period in which he wrote his sacred poetry was almost certainly one of great intellectual, emotional,

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<sup>15</sup>Hutchinson, pp. 109-112. Hutchinson notes that many of Vaughan's friends and neighbors were evicted from their rectorships because they had ignored the Puritan regime's Ordinance of January 1644/45 prohibiting the use of the Book of Common Prayer. Even the poet's brother Thomas was evicted from the rectorship of Llansantffraed, his native parish, in 1649/50.

and spiritual crisis -- of tension, pressure, and conflict. He slowly remade himself into the resigned, devout Christian apparent in his sacred poetry.

Although innumerable men have passed through psychological and spiritual turmoil without writing a single line of verse, Vaughan was a man of rich imaginative resources, well practised in verse composition, widely and curiously read. Religion gave him the vital, engrossing subject of Silex Scintillans that was notably lacking in his earlier writing, and the urge to communicate his religious experience brought into his poetry the rich world of his private imagination. His early exposure to the wonders of nature in the sensitive days of early childhood and his later disappointment in human nature during his impressionable youth were easily translatable into spiritual metaphor and symbol. Religion had transformed the images of his unregenerate days into the complex, compelling symbols of his sacred poems.

The religious poetry of Henry Vaughan is, however, universal as well as particular. In other words, the expression of his spiritual experience is not merely the sum of isolated individual impressions but grows out of the whole orthodox tradition of western Christian thought.

Three distinct but interrelated traditions of thought that passed down through the Middle Ages side by side and entered seventeenth-century consciousness need attention if

one is to understand Vaughan's method of expression as well as the meaning of his aural images. The first of these is the influence of Neo-Platonic thought on man's sense perceptions and his consequent understanding of the created world. The second and third, the notion of man's total depravity and Hermeticism, require at least cursory examination if the reader is to understand fully the symbolic meaning of many of Vaughan's specific aural images.

The characteristic nature of Vaughan's imagery is related to that tradition of symbolic thought and contemplation found in Neo-Platonism as it descended from Greek Platonism and was absorbed into a Christian context by Plotinus for the philosophers and St. Augustine for the churchmen. It found the soil best adapted for its growth in the seventeenth century at Cambridge, where its adherents, although sharing the general preoccupation of the century with reason, believed that "right reason was inseparable from true faith, the two being reconciled in an idealistic philosophy."<sup>16</sup>

Basically, Neo-Platonism had given a mystical development to the Platonic concept of the material world as a shadow of the immaterial world. To Plato, the created universe was but a reflection and, therefore, an imperfect copy

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<sup>16</sup>Marjorie Cox, "The Background to English Literature: 1603-1660," *From Donne to Marvell*, ed. Boris Ford (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 77.

of the Ideal, stable world beyond. Because the realm of nature and human experience was in a constant state of change, Platonists believed that man could never attain knowledge or truth from his sense perceptions or from immediate experience. Essential truths, dimly revealed in phenomena, are apprehended only in the mind; hence, all art that relies on a description of the created world is false. Only when the mind of man transcends the specific objects and ideas to the universal unchanging ones does he find perfect Beauty and Justice and discover true reality.<sup>17</sup>

Neo-Platonists, in defending art against Plato's assumption, contended that the arts do not simply imitate the visible, but go back to the Source from which nature comes. They saw an essential emanation of all created things from the One Indefinable Source, and they recognized that a continuous chain of being led from the lowest creature to God, who is Pure Being.<sup>18</sup> To the Neo-Platonist, moreover, this chain of being rises from the notion of God's plenitude and is essentially optimistic; no possible form of life has been excluded from the blessings of creation. The poet can, therefore, create much out of what is visible and add to what is defective in imitation by being himself in

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<sup>17</sup>Elbert N. S. Thompson, "Mysticism in Seventeenth-Century English Literature," Studies in Philology, XVIII (1921), 189-192.

<sup>18</sup>Thompson, p. 179.

possession of a higher beauty of imagination.

This higher beauty of the imagination Vaughan found in the Image of God within himself, which could be conceived and expressed in his specific images only after his conversion. The enlightened vision of the poet is revealed in the image. It is not the outward form of the thing that the poet is describing, but rather the abstraction, its inner meaning to him. The image, consequently, takes its form from thought.

In another sense, too, the reader of Vaughan feels in his natural images the unreality of the physical world the poet evokes. The scenes are never merely the native Breconshire countryside but have an aura of otherworldliness about them, reminiscent of Biblical landscape. The native hills are also the hills of Bethany that sing their hymns of praise, the groves become the silent sacred "shades" of entrance into religious communion, the whispering wind that rustles the leaves becomes the breath of God. It is never the outward look or sound that his images describe nor even the outward relationships and connection of the objects pictured, but something in their inner organic nature that is revealed. The principle of his images is that, if one looks closely at the organic nature or the function of any object or fact, he will feel and find in its essential being, in the relationship by which it is unified, the principles and patterns on



which the whole universe is constructed and the principles by which man's thought comes to understand God and his creation. The objects of the sense lead to the ultimate truth beyond. To Vaughan, they are the symbols of a higher beauty "whose meaner shows and outward utensils these glories are."<sup>19</sup> They are those "hid ascents" by which man can "climb to that day / Which breaks from Thee / Who art in all things, though invisibly."<sup>20</sup>

All the manifestations of creation are thus seen as infinite treasures because, through faith, the poet has come to find the place of everything. He now understands the immense powers of the Image of God that lies within himself. Thus, the intuitive, Eden-like vision of his childhood has been collected again by higher reason and illuminated by faith. He has found the inward paradise: the similitude and presence of God in the whole creation.<sup>21</sup> Reading nature or reading the Bible in this new light, Vaughan came to feel as St. Augustine had that God's creatures were the concrete symbolism of moral and speculative truth. The ultimate reality, the true Essence of God, can be conceived only in the mind; but man must find a way of reaching and attaining

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<sup>19</sup>Works, "Midnight," p. 421.

<sup>20</sup>Works, "I walkt the other day (to spend my hour)," p. 478.

<sup>21</sup>Louis L. Martz, The Poetry of Meditation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), pp. 150-152.

the ultimate truths.<sup>22</sup>

In other words, to Vaughan as to St. Augustine, contemplating God's universe in order to divine His purpose and nature is the beginning of salvation. Augustine had said:

Wherever you turn, He speaketh to thee by traces, which He has impressed upon His works, and by the very form of outward things recalls thee, when sinking down to things outward. Woe to them who leave Thee, who for Thee, love these intimations of Thee, and forget what Thou intimatest! O Wisdom, Thou most sweet light of the cleansed mind; for Thou ceasest not to intimate to us what and how great Thou art, and these intimations of Thee is [sic] the universal beauty of creation.<sup>23</sup>

Augustine is defining the organic unity of the universe. For him, the principle of the Incarnation is realized in the principle of being, all things deriving their essence from God and leading the mind back to God; and thus is refuted the absolute idealism of the Platonists whose spirit universe would deny any reality to the Incarnation of the creatures and any meaning to individual sense experience.

Hugh of St. Victor, too, in his Didascalia added Christian meaning to symbolic expression. "Philosophers know only the meaning of words, but truly more significant is the signification of things."<sup>24</sup> God is seen when the

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<sup>22</sup>Ruth Wallerstein, Studies in Seventeenth Century Poetic (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1950), pp. 188-191.

<sup>23</sup>Quoted in Garner, p. 23, from Pusey's translation (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1843) of St. Augustine's Confessions 4.12.18.

<sup>24</sup>Wallerstein, p. 47.

world is contemplated. The pattern outlined by Hugh of St. Victor receives fuller development in St. Bonaventure. To him, "the book of the creatures is the supreme revelation to human consciousness of the Divine Essence, perfectly manifest to Adam until sin blinded him."<sup>25</sup>

Vaughan's use of imagery from the natural world is influenced, then, by the Platonic philosophy of the Ideal World as its denial of the validity of sensuous impression was amended by Christian philosophers. The created world is essentially an allegory of the eternal world; and the eternal world is the reality beneath the appearance. It is the essence of true art, then, not merely to copy the world of particulars but to reveal the reality behind it. Only by seeing this perspective in Vaughan's thought can his delight in nature be reconciled with his longing for the other world. For, when Vaughan sees in the stone, the tree, and the bird the working of the Holy Spirit, and still yearns for absorption into a transcendent God, he can find the transcendent God in His own creation. And this he does in his imagery of the natural world. Immanence and transcendence are not so much antithetical as complementary. One need not be sacrificed for the other.

Vaughan was optimistic about creation in general. It was divine, and by comprehending it, he could comprehend the

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<sup>25</sup>Wallerstein, p. 49.

world beyond. It was the "given" of Divine Providence, and he used its revealed knowledge as a guide for man's instruction. But, at the same time, he was pessimistic about human nature; and, in order to understand the sounds which emanate from disorderly man, it is necessary to understand the currents of thought that led to this pessimistic view of man's plight.

Vaughan, like many another Anglican of his day, felt that the only virtuous man is he who has the direct assistance of divine favor. The voluntary sin of Adam had degraded both man's will and his reason so that he required special assistance from God in order to know truth and behave virtuously. The most common expression of this Augustinian view is the de contemptu mundi theme, which Vaughan was no doubt best acquainted with in the "Parenetical Epistle" of the fifth-century Bishop of Lyons, which he translated as "The World Contemned" and included among his Flores solitudinis (1654). It reveals the same deplorable condition of man that underlies many of Vaughan's aural images in Silex Scintillans.

The perversity that produced the fall had tainted the entire man, including his reason. It is with this Augustinian concept of man's total depravity in mind that Vaughan wrote in Silex Scintillans:

O what am I, that I should breed  
 Figs on a thorne, flowres on a weed!  
 I am the gourd of sin, and sorrow  
 Growing o'r night, and gone to morrow,  
 In all this Round of life and death  
 Nothing's more vile than is my breath,  
 Profanenes on my tongue doth rest,  
 Defects, and darknes in my brest,  
 Pollutions all my body wed,  
 And even my soul to thee is dead,  
 Only in him, on whom I feast,  
 Both soul, and body are well drest.<sup>26</sup>

Because of the perversity of fallen man, Vaughan longed to travel back to the innocent, unfallen state that man had in the Garden of Eden. It was from an Eden conceived as a garden in much of Vaughan's visual imagery that man was in constant mystical intercourse with God. In his early days, like Adam, man "saw Heaven o'r his head, and knew from whence / He came (condemned) hither."<sup>27</sup> But man moved away from Paradise, and even his sighs for the lost Eden were a thing of the past; man's soul was veiled in the contaminated flesh of the body to be pierced only by the grace of God. Man had moved away from the "white age"<sup>28</sup> that Vaughan often equated with childhood, a time when for Vaughan the element

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<sup>26</sup>Works, "Repentance," p. 448.

<sup>27</sup>Works, "Corruption," p. 440.

<sup>28</sup>Hutchinson (p. 162) notes the poet's fondness for the word white as an epithet for all that he values most. Hutchinson goes further to relate the word white to the rich connotations of the Welsh word gwyn "which signifies not only white but fair, happy, holy, blessed. There is no more frequent epithet in Welsh poetry; it is the word which introduces each of the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, and a Welsh word for Paradise is gwynfyd, the white world."

of natural law implanted in him at birth by God had not yet been obscured by the sin that ruined the original gift of God.

In "Mans fall, and Recovery," the everlasting hills are Eden, which man has left to live under clouds, where his divine element (here represented by a flower) droops and sleeps. He is now a slave to passion, and has lost the true light and retains only the ineradicable conscience. Then, came the Old Law, which by its dominantly prohibitive nature exacerbated rather than controlled his state of sin; finally, the Incarnation gave man in its place a law of love by faith. Trusting to man's reason, then, is pride:

Grant I may soft and lowly be,  
And minde those things I cannot see;  
Tye me to faith, though above reason,  
Who question power, they speak treason:  
Let me thy Ass be onely wise  
To carry, not search mysteries;  
Who carries thee, is by thee lead,  
Who argues, follows his own head.<sup>29</sup>

The intense self-recrimination and overwhelming determination to humble pride were in accordance with the skepticism of the seventeenth century of which the belief in the nullity and uselessness of man's knowledge, the opposition of faith and reason, and the total depravity of man's nature were significant manifestations. Vaughan, with other Anglicans and Royalists, must have found it difficult to retain an optimistic view of man when the 1640s had seen destruction

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<sup>29</sup>Works, "The Ass," p. 518.

of the traditional framework in Church and State with its attendant violence and personal heartbreak. The wicked had been victorious, and Vaughan's prayers in The Mount of Olives (1652) are those of a man struggling with adversity and sorrow:

Consider, O Lord, the teares of thy Spouse which are daily upon her cheeks, whose adversaries are grown mighty, and her enemies prosper. The wayes of Zion do mourne, our beautiful gates are shut up, and the Comforter that should relieve our souls is gone far from us. Thy Service and thy Sabbaths, thy own sacred Institutions and the pledges of thy love are denied unto us; Thy Ministers are trodden down, and the basest of the people are set up in thy holy place.

. . . . .

Thou seest, O God, how furious and Implacable mine Enemies are, they have not only rob'd me of that portion and provision which thou hadst graciously given me, but they have also washed their hands in the blood of my friends, my dearest and nearest relatives.<sup>30</sup>

A third current of thought attractive to the seventeenth century mind and important to an understanding of Vaughan's aural imagery is Hermeticism. Although it was soon to disappear, this occult philosophy was still a cultural stream of some importance during most of Vaughan's lifetime. Its philosophical and religious ideas derived, through some of the main courses of medieval thought, from an ultimate source that incorporated Greek science into Egyptian priestcraft with an infusion of the mystery religions of the East.

Vaughan's exposure to this philosophy was more than

<sup>30</sup>Works, p. 166-167.

just an incidental one. Two of his translations, Hermetical Physick (1655) and The Chymists Key (1657), are concerned with the medical aspects of the hermetic doctrine. Moreover, his twin brother, Thomas, was perhaps the leading British exponent of the Hermeticism of the time.<sup>31</sup> The poet often acted upon his brother's creed:

In summer translate thyself to the fields, where all are green with the breath of God and fresh with the powers of heaven. Learn to refer all naturals to their spirituals by way of secret analogy. . . . Sometimes thou mayst walk in groves, which being full of mystery will much advance the soul; sometimes by clear active rivers, for by such--say the mystic poets--Apollo contemplated. . . . This is the way I would have thee walk in if thou dost intend to be a solid Christian philosopher.<sup>32</sup>

A common tenet of Hermeticism centered in this notion that divine knowledge is revealed through nature. The idea that God is perpetually at work in nature, although common enough in traditional Christian writing, incorporated in Hermeticism a continual interaction between the Divine Light and the seeds of "star-fire" that are in all created things. This "magnetism," shared by the inanimate as well as the animate creatures, gave even the plants and minerals the ability to respond consciously to the celestial influence of the Visible Heavens and the Divine Light of the Invisible Heavens.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Pettet, p. 71

<sup>32</sup>Quoted in Pettet, p. 79, from Anima Magica Abscondita, Waite's ed., pp. 115-17.

<sup>33</sup>Ralph M. Wardle, "Thomas Vaughan's Influence on Henry Vaughan," PMLA, LI (October, 1936), 943-946.



Vaughan, in adapting this tenet of Hermeticism for his own use, does not refer to the existence of "star-fire" in himself, but seems to attribute it only to the creatures beneath man. It played the part of a little soul for them; in man it was superfluous because of the presence of the true soul. To him this inherent "star-fire" helped bind the various material objects of the universe into a spiritual whole; but more important for his aural imagery, Vaughan in adapting the responsive capacity which the Hermetists attributed to all life, gave each of God's creatures voice as well. His aural images portray all of creation as essentially animate, endowed with life and with this responsive capacity. The creatures lift their heads upwards in earnest expectation of their Creator, and respond to him aurally as well. From the leaf of the oak tree that whispers to his companion trees in the grove to the cock that punctually greets the morning light with a song, each of nature's creatures shared with man that celestial influence that the Hermetists called the "inherent star-fire."

The physical environment that Vaughan enjoyed as a child combined with the social and intellectual contacts of his youth, then, to provide the genesis of the aural images in Silex Scintillans. Traditions common to his age interacted with personal impressions to shape these poetic images into complex symbols, the meaning of which could be understood only in a seventeenth-century context of thought.

## CHAPTER THREE

AURAL IMAGES IN SILEX SCINTILLANS

The background that provided material for Vaughan's imagery and that helped form the unique sensibility expressed in it has been discussed in the preceding chapter. Vaughan was a poet, then, who experienced from the beginning of his life and at first hand that country life to which Herbert came only in his maturity and the urban Donne and the scholastic Crashaw not at all. The place of his birth and childhood had opened to Vaughan areas and possibilities of experience denied to most of his contemporary poets. The impressions of his environment combined with the intellectual currents of thought and traditions of his age to influence the selection, use, and meaning of his poetic imagery.

The present chapter will examine in detail the aural images found in Silex Scintillans in order to show how the various "threads" combine to form the intricate pattern of his experience. The poet's earlier secular poems, although reflecting his awareness of nature, lacked the high seriousness of purpose with which Vaughan integrated his unique sensibility in Silex Scintillans. It is only in this religious poetry that the "masques and shadows" of the created world become the images through which essential truths are

revealed. Because the natural world emanated from God and was still a part of God, the creatures became the living, perceivable exempla in which the unity of God and his creation could be discovered.

However, we cannot fully understand his images from the natural world without a glance at the same time at man's world because Vaughan always thought in terms of man's relation to God contrasted with nature's reactions to its Creator. Nature is one with God. Man is not. Nature follows a unified plan, and in observing its manifold sense impressions, man can come to understand the eternal world behind each image. Moreover, in many images from the natural world, the reader is made conscious of man's place in the parallel.

Nature is open to the same influences as man. The plant, as it grows from the seed to the blossoming flower, needs suitable soil in which to grow, frequent showers and exposure to sunlight to nourish its growth; but it, also, is exposed to destructive forces -- weeds that choke it and frosts and storms that blight and damage its budding flower. It is not the plant, however, that interests the reader but the meaning behind the analogy with man. What happens in the natural world is duplicated in man's life, but nature and man react differently to the many stimuli of their environment. Nature is in God, open to His commands and obedient

to His decrees, whereas man often strays, because his reason and will are in conflict with the Divine plan. The images, therefore, exist not to adorn the poetry but for the meaning they express.

Moreover, the poet's message is not conveyed in one image or even in one poem; for this reason, the unity of Silex Scintillans was earlier stressed. A pattern emerges from the total imagery -- a pattern composed of many intricate designs, all organized into one compelling whole. The visual image is a large part of the pattern of the image cluster, but it is not the whole of it. The aural images are superimposed on the visual design to weave essential meaning into the poetry that could not be conveyed without them.

One such design emerges from Vaughan's frequent use of the sounds of running water; another from the creatures and their sighs of longing and songs of praise; and still a third from the plant and its attendant imagery. But the images from nature provide only one side of the total pattern, for on the obverse, integral with the natural images and yet providing a contrast, are the images that portray man's world.

Because of the close interrelationship of the images, it is difficult to select a point at which to begin an exploration of the rich imaginative world revealed there; but because of the poet's many references to water, this area of

investigation will be examined first. The manifestations included in the water imagery are many. It falls as rain showers from heaven; it nourishes the plant in the form of dew; it gushes from the confines of the earth, or it drips from a fountain; but, mainly, it forms the springs and streams encountered frequently in the poetry. The meaning implicit in the water imagery has been diagrammatically represented by E. C. Pettet:

Fountains of life.	Heaven. Immortality.
Exhalations. Rain.	Divine Grace, Love and Pity
Showers. Dew. Christ's	Baptism. Prayer.
'saving tears'.	
Springs, streams, etc.	Repentance. Purification.
(Puddles). Man's tears.	Regeneration. <sup>1</sup>

In knowing the symbolism inherent in the visual manifestation, it becomes easier to understand the significance of the added aural image. It is necessary, however, to look at a number of images before a meaning of the whole begins to emerge.

In "Vanity of Spirit," the poet begins with his usual personal approach, "Quite spent with thought I left my Cell, and lay / Where a shrill spring tun'd to the early day." Later in the same poem, after an exploratory excursion in nature's realm, he adds, "Here of this mighty spring, I

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<sup>1</sup>Pettet, p. 43.

found some drills,<sup>2</sup> / With Ecchoes beaten from th' eternall hills."<sup>3</sup> In "The Timber," the reader finds this spring has been formed from the "blest showers . . . and streams sent from above,"<sup>4</sup> and in "Repentance," the poet writes, "But give them (willful rebels) in those streams a part / Whose spring is in my Saviours heart."<sup>5</sup> The individual images begin to form a meaning. The sounds of the drilling spring are echoes from eternity. These sounds will become important only as they echo the source from which the spring was derived and to which it will eventually return. Descending to earth as the blest showers of its divine origin, the water of the spring will have temporary contact with earth before it returns to the source of which it is an integral part. As the shrill voice of the spring tunes itself to early day, it is in harmony with the rest of the divinely created world. The visual image underlies the conception, but it is the aural image that changes an essentially inanimate object of nature into "living water" and proclaims its divine origin.

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<sup>2</sup>The word drills suggests here the sound of the underground water that erupts to form the spring. In the preceding line the poet is searching for "traces, and sounds of a strange kind" within himself as he implicitly parallels the spring and man.

<sup>3</sup>Works, p. 418.

<sup>4</sup>Works, p. 497.

<sup>5</sup>Works, p. 448.

Other aural images reinforce the essential living quality of the spring and add further meaning once the total pattern is seen. In "The Dawning," this "restless, vocall Spring / All day, and night doth run, and sing";<sup>6</sup> in "The Search," it is an "angry spring" that "Breaks into sighs";<sup>7</sup> in "Christs Nativity," it is a "busie spring" that joins with the woods and the winds to form a "Consort" to celebrate the birthday of the King;<sup>8</sup> and in "Rules and Lessons," it blends with the leaves, the bushes, and the oak tree to sing its "Morning-hymn" to the great "I AM."<sup>9</sup>

It is not, however, until the aural image in "The Water-fall" is comprehended that the reader is made aware that Vaughan is drawing a parallel with the life of man and has extended this analogy into each of the other individual images in order that man might follow the example of the stream in his relation to God:

With what deep murmurs through times silent stealth  
Doth thy transparent, cool and watry wealth  
    Here flowing fall,  
    And chide, and call,  
As if his liquid, loose Retinue staid  
Lingring, and were of this steep place afraid,

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<sup>6</sup>Works, p. 451.

<sup>7</sup>Works, p. 405.

<sup>8</sup>Works, p. 442.

<sup>9</sup>Works, p. 436.

The common pass  
Where, clear as glass,  
All must descend  
Not to an end:

But quickned by this deep and rocky grave,  
Rise to a longer course more bright and brave.<sup>10</sup>

In the drama of the stream approaching the fall, the poet has suggested a parallel with man's passage through life. The hesitation of the stream before it takes that final, decisive plunge over the pass is man's hesitation in the face of death. His fear of the unknown into which all must pass in death is understood from the aural image of the chiding, calling water. Man, like the water of the stream, cannot turn back; he must go over the fall before he, too, can pursue a longer course "more bright and brave."

In the underground stream of "Religion," the parallel with man's life is suggested, too.

But in her long, and hidden Course  
Passing through the Earths darke veines,  
Growes still from better unto worse,  
And both her taste, and colour staines,

Then drilling on, learnes to encrease  
False Echoes, and Confused sounds.<sup>11</sup>

The contamination of the water by earth is clearly revealed by the aural image. The "Confused sounds" and "False Echoes" belong only to temporal existence, to the earth-bound water. The "headlong and loose" waters that "search out ev'ry hole, and Creek" in "Misery," the poet tells us,

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<sup>10</sup>Works, p. 537.

<sup>11</sup>Works, p. 404.



"take the downrode to vanities,"<sup>12</sup> and eventually become like the stagnant "puddle" in "The Dawning," motionless and soundless, already "dead, and in a grave,"<sup>13</sup> or like the water that has quit its channel in "The Mutinie," expressing regret, murmuring "sore,"<sup>14</sup> at leaving its bounds.

After the parallel with man's life becomes apparent, all of the aural images are suddenly charged with further meaning. The stream, although it has superficial contact with dust after its eruption from its confines deep within the earth, keeps flowing and singing, pursuing its course through time, intent on reunion with the Source of its being. Some of the water may quit the normal course of the stream, but, in so doing, it voices its regret as it becomes the stagnant puddle. Most of the water will keep flowing and singing, its "vocal" waters praising the Creator and breaking into anguished sighs of yearning for absorption into its Source. The water may hesitantly call, but, nonetheless, it will follow the prearranged course over the fall.

The things of nature follow an ordered plan because they are one with God. The stream sent from above must have commerce with the dust before it can return pure untainted to

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<sup>12</sup>Works, p. 472.

<sup>13</sup>Works, p. 451. In addition to the stagnant puddle in "The Dawning," Vaughan uses this image antithetical to the flowing stream in "Religion," and in "Daphnis," (p. 679).

<sup>14</sup>Works, p. 468.

its original source, but "Dust and clay" are "mans antient wear," too; and while his "soul sojourns here,"<sup>15</sup> it wears this veil of the body. Why cannot man, made in the Image of God, also follow an ordered existence, pursuing his course through temporal life with only the ultimate objective in mind, reunion with his Divine Source? Why cannot he, like the stream or the spring, swell into a concert of praise to his Creator or break into anguished sighs of longing for home?

Vaughan has built a complex image cluster out of the streams and springs that he enjoyed as a child and found consolation in as an adult, and the aural image is a significant part of that cluster. The essential unity of the created world, exemplified by the stream, has given its message to man as the poet parallels its existence to that of man. The streams and the springs are one with God, emanating from Him, mingling with the dust of earth, but eventually returning to their Creator. Man, like the stream of "The Waterfall," can "rise to a longer course more bright and brave" and run "singing home" if he will but heed the lessons of nature that are implicit in Vaughan's aural imagery.

It is not only through the sounds of water that God's plan in an ordered natural world is revealed, but other

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<sup>15</sup>Works, "Ascension-Hymn," p. 482.

aural images continually reinforce the ordered response of creation to its Maker:

All things that be, praise him: and had  
Their lesson taught them, when first made.<sup>16</sup>

Vaughan's bird of light, the cock, contains within itself that "sunnie seed" that makes it shine and sing "as if it knew / The path unto the house of light."<sup>17</sup> It is this same oneness of creation that induces the birds in the groves to sing their "early hymn" or chirp their "solemn matins"<sup>18</sup> and the silkworm to "hum" as it sheds its shell and wings upward.<sup>19</sup> The leaf, the bush, and the oak join in response to the source of their being:

Walk with thy fellow-creatures: note the hush  
And whispers amongst them. There's not a Spring,  
Or Leafe but hath his Morning-hymn; Each Bush  
And Oak doth know I AM; canst thou not sing?<sup>20</sup>

The plants of the ground "sadly sigh" and "speak" to the neighboring trees in "sad soliloquies" because they are "oppress'd with earth,"<sup>21</sup> as are the stones that "moan" for their "full liberty."<sup>22</sup> The turtle-dove, traditionally symbolic of the soul faithful to God and constant in its

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<sup>16</sup>Works, "The Bird," p. 496.

<sup>17</sup>Works, "Cock-crowing," p. 488.

<sup>18</sup>Works, "The Bird," p. 496.

<sup>19</sup>Works, "Resurrection and Immortality," p. 400.

<sup>20</sup>Works, "Rules and Lessons," p. 436.

<sup>21</sup>Works, "The Search," p. 405.

<sup>22</sup>Works, "And do they so," p. 432.

adoration, "mourns," too, for freedom from the earthly state.<sup>23</sup>

The creatures, too, are to be renewed at the second coming of Christ, for Vaughan plainly interprets St. Paul as positing a regeneration of the natural order as well as of the spiritual order when in "Palm-Sunday" he exhorts the creatures to "lift up your heads and leave your moans" for His "death will be Mans life, and your full liberty."<sup>24</sup>

The creatures, as well as the stream, are united as one with God. They display obedience, order, and stability in their confirmation of the Divine plan. Their voiced response to their Creator, revealed in the aural imagery, is the significant poetic device in conveying this idea.

Moreover, their aural response is often harmonious. Natural sounds blend in harmony to celebrate the birthday of their King:

Awak, awak! heark, how th' wood rings,  
Winds whisper, and the busie springs  
 A Consort make.<sup>25</sup>

Sometimes, the fields join in with their "full hymns" as the "hills and valleys into singing break."<sup>26</sup> The sounds of the "rising winds," "the falling spring," and the "consort" of

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<sup>23</sup>Works, "The Bird," p. 496.

<sup>24</sup>Works, p. 501.

<sup>25</sup>Works, "Christs Nativity," p. 442.

<sup>26</sup>Works, "The Dawning," p. 451.

birds all blend into the "hyming circulations"<sup>27</sup> of the earth, and "ev'ry sphere in music doth contend."<sup>28</sup> The entire universe joins in the earthly chorus as the creatures combine their voice to produce the "great Chime and Symphony of nature."<sup>29</sup> It is the world "in tune," the music of an ordered creation.

Vaughan has used the response of the entire, articulate universe in his aural imagery to reveal its divine origin and its essential unity with God. Nature is good, but it is not the ultimate good. It is the means to the good beyond, the reflection of God's purpose for man. The sounds that emanate from the created world are merely "ecchoes" from the eternal hills. Vaughan writes explicitly of the purpose of the creatures in The Mount of Olives:

Do not we see divers birds of this regiment such as are commonly known to us, with other meaner Creatures as silkworms and the humble bee, which yet are not so contemptible, but they may serve us for noble instance in this point (as symbols of the resurrection), seeing there is in them a living spirit, and that creatures of the same rank with them are recorded in God's own word, yea, and are own'd by him as memorable and select Instruments of his service.<sup>30</sup>

Natural response, then, is according to Divine plan, and the

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<sup>27</sup>Works, "The Morning-watch," p. 424.

<sup>28</sup>Works, "Christs Nativity," p. 442.

<sup>29</sup>Works, "The Morning-watch," p. 424.

<sup>30</sup>Works, p. 177.

observation of this natural order by man can serve to lead him to God. Nature, like man, however, is open to disruptive influences, too; and Vaughan chose the aural image of the storm with its high winds and beating rain to reinforce the lesson nature teaches.

Whereas in the above examples Vaughan uses mainly aural imagery to convey his principal idea, the design of the storm and its attendant images combines the visual and the aural to suggest the meaning. The significance of the aural image lies in its analogy to the disrupting influences in man's life and is completely necessary to the point the poet wants to stress.

The visual and aural image come together in "Unprofitableness" as the "snarling blasts" of the storm leave the flower "sullied with dust and mud," its bleak leaves hopelessly hanging after the storm has sheared its "youth and beauty."<sup>31</sup> The infant buds of the flower in "Regeneration" have been "blasted," too, by the surly winds of the storm,<sup>32</sup> and the flower in "Man's fall and Recovery" "sleeps and droops" after its encounter with the storm.<sup>33</sup> Even the dead tree in "The Timber" is disturbed by the "fierce breath of

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<sup>31</sup>Works, p. 441.

<sup>32</sup>Works, p. 397.

<sup>33</sup>Works, p. 411.

tempests,"<sup>34</sup> and the winds of the "sullen storm" blow through the bird's lodging in the tree while the beating rains fall on its "harmless head."<sup>35</sup>

In spite of the apparent affliction occasioned by the storm, the natural order not only survives but recognizes the disruption as a part of a foreordained plan. The flower, its leaves drooping with mud, responds to the life-giving Sun as it "opens to the Ray." The bird who has survived the stormy night greets the light-filled morning with a "hymn" of praise to its Creator:

And now as fresh and chearful as the light  
Thy little heart in early hymns doth sing  
Unto that Providence, whose unseen arm  
Curb'd them, and cloath'd thee well and warm.<sup>36</sup>

The storm has been a significant purging influence for the flower and for the bird, an instrumental force in the acceptance of God's plan. Vaughan iterates the symbolism inherent in this aural image in the concluding lines of another poem, "The Storm":

So shall that storme purge this Recluse  
Which sinfull ease made foul,  
And wind, and water to thy use  
Both wash, and wing my soul.<sup>37</sup>

The aural image of the storm represents the affliction that

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<sup>35</sup>Works, "The Bird," p. 496.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Works, p. 423.

God visits on man to disturb his "sinfull ease." Vaughan had experienced mental anguish in the disappointment of his political and religious hopes, in the deaths of friends and his brother, and he had experienced physical affliction, too. These "storms" of temporal life had made him more cognizant of man's inadequacy and of his consequent dependence on God. The poet may have been thinking of his own disturbing and disheartening experiences when he wrote, "Poor birds sing best / When their nest is fallen and broken."<sup>38</sup> In the same manner, he uses the aural imagery of the storm in nature, for in the response of the damaged flower and the afflicted bird, there is meaning for man. Affliction is sometimes a necessary purgational device. Storms may damage the physical body, but they rekindle the spirit.

Nature follows an ordered existence, then, for it is, essentially, an integral part of the Divine plan. Disruptions occur as a part of this plan, but nature recuperates from affliction with renewed zeal, as God intended that man should. The aural imagery has been mainly responsible in bringing this meaning to the reader.

Behind the images from nature, moreover, there is always the presence of man and his relationship to God. Vaughan was acutely aware of the contrast between the steadfastness of the natural order and the straying restlessness

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<sup>38</sup>Works, "Begging," p. 501.



of man. The creatures glorified God by nature, not by intention, for intention implies will and reason. Because they belonged to a different order from human beings, they did not possess human souls or mind or personalities. Theirs is the order of natural life, operating not by the laws of physics apart from God but in accordance with Divine decree. Man, on the other hand, shares both nature, like the creatures, and grace, like the angels. Because he is placed next to angels in the hierarchy of being, man is endowed with reason and, consequently, will. It is this willfulness that Vaughan often views as a distinct handicap. The poet envies the creatures that are "tyed to one sure state" even while man is "sadly loose and stray, a giddy blast each way."<sup>39</sup>

All have their keyes, and set ascents; but man  
 Tho he know these, and hath more of his own  
 Sleeps at the ladders foot; alas! what can  
 These new discoveries do, except they drown?<sup>40</sup>

In order to emphasize the often confused response of man compared to the ordered response of Creation, the poet employs significant contrasting aural images to depict the rebelliousness and instability of willful human nature. The perversity within man that tempts him to follow false gods and the external distractions that lead him to follow the "pomp" and the "noise" of the "busie street of flesh and

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<sup>39</sup>Works, "And do they so," p. 432.

<sup>40</sup>Works, "The Tempest," p. 461.

blood" are revealed in the aural images. Instead of steadfastness, there is distraction; instead of order, there is disorder; and instead of harmony, there is dissonance.

The distracting noises of the night birds which the poet calls the "black parasites," the "poys'nouse, subtile fowls," and the "flyes of hell" in "The Proffer" constitute one such aural image.<sup>41</sup> In the opening lines of the poem, these black parasites are admonished to "be still." These fowls or flies<sup>42</sup> (Vaughan uses the terms interchangeably) have come at night to attract the pilgrim from his chosen way. They come in the guise of bees swooping down to suck the flowers that have bloomed,<sup>43</sup> but they are in reality, the poet tells us, the "flyes of hell / That buz in every ear," seeking out weak spots to corrupt in order to spoil the soul's wholesomeness.

Behind the metaphor of the buzzing flies are the world's partisans who will praise man in the hope that their false

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<sup>41</sup>Works, p. 486.

<sup>42</sup>The fifth sense of the word fly given in The Oxford English Dictionary fits Vaughan's symbol: "A familiar demon (from the notion that devils were accustomed to assume the form of flies) . . . and with the allusion to the insect's finding its way into the most private places, . . . a parasite, flatterer."

<sup>43</sup>Bees bear various meanings in Vaughan's work but always are of good and pious import. They are an example for man of the creature's steadfastness (p. 477) or of humble virtue in contrast to the hawk's pursuit of glory (p. 511); "Son-dayes" are hives of rest for the pious spirit (p. 447), and the Bible is a hive of beamy, living lights (p. 529).

worldly praise will satisfy and flatter him. Vaughan had early in his life been exposed to these "prime delights," "the purles of youthfull bloud," "lust in the Robes of Love," and the "idle talk of feav'rish souls"<sup>44</sup> that the voices of the flies of hell offered. He wrote in The Mount of Olives that "his heart had been a nest of unclean birds, where they have not onley laine, but hatched and brought forth their viperous young ones."<sup>45</sup> At that time, he had accepted the world's proffer. In "The Proffer" as in his own life after his conversion, he warns the fowls to "descend not here, nor think to stay, / I've read, who 'twas, drove you away." The poet, because of his almost subconscious familiarity with and consequent frequent allusion to Genesis, may have been thinking of the fowls that swooped down on Abraham's sacrifice. Steadfast Abraham with whom God had sealed His covenant had driven away these distractions and inquietudes of the flesh, these devils that came to tempt even God's chosen people.<sup>46</sup>

Most men are unsuccessful, however, in driving away the the distracting temptations, because they are the lusts of the flesh and the deceiving temptations within man himself.

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<sup>44</sup>Works, "Idle Verse," p. 447.

<sup>45</sup>Works, p. 161.

<sup>46</sup>Robert Allen Durr, "Vaughan's Pilgrim and the Birds of Night: 'The Proffer'," Modern Language Quarterly, XXI (March, 1960), 45-58.

The world  
 Is full of voices; Man is call'd and hurl'd  
     By each, he answers all,  
     Knows ev'ry note, and call,  
     Hence, still  
 Fresh dotage tempts, or old usurps his will.<sup>47</sup>

The "doting lover" of "The World" has been seduced by the " quaint" music of the lusts of the flesh into the "snares of pleasure," and the "darksome Statesman" of the same poem has been lured into the false pride by the "clouds of crying witnesses" who suddenly turn on him and pursue him with a "shout" until he is driven underground, like the mole, to carry on his corrupting ways.<sup>48</sup> Both the lecher and the statesman are symbolic here of the false love of the world that beckons man to fulfill his own corrupt desires, and the temptations to which they succumb are portrayed in the aural imagery.

Moreover, the reader of the entire volume of poetry becomes aware that in addition to their necessity to meaning, the aural images have provided effective contrast that further enhance their meaning.

In contrast to the noisy birds of night that figuratively represent the world's partisans and their deceptive noises are the birds of day, the cock who eagerly announces the dawn of a new day with a song and the birds who chirp their "solemn matins" and sing their "early hymns." The

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<sup>47</sup>Works, "Distraction," p. 413.

<sup>48</sup>Works, p. 466.

false praise of man is contrasted with the genuine, intrinsic praise of the creatures. The "quaint" music to which the lover succumbs, Vaughan names elsewhere as the "forced accents," the "dumb course measures"<sup>49</sup> that emanate from the world of man. Man is the "arted" string in contrast to the "symphony" heard in nature.

The contrast between harmonious nature and discordant man, however, is not the only contrast that Vaughan achieves in his aural imagery, for repentant man and unregenerate man are often identified by the poet's contrasting aural imagery.

Vaughan had known and had walked the paths of "folly" in his "youthful, sinful age"; and, as he recounts in "The Relapse," had slipped "almost to hell."<sup>50</sup> It was on the "verge of that dark, dreadful pit" that he had heard the "yell" and the "howl" of those who had followed the world's way. In the same poem, he contrasts the noise of that dreadful pit with the serenity of the "brightest day" for those who chose the redemptive force of the Saviour's blood, "Sweet downie thoughts; soft Lilly-shades; Calm streams." Only agreeable sights and sounds greet repentant man, a compelling contrast to the discordant "yell" and "howl" that mark the dark, dreadful place of the lost sinner.

Another contrasting aural image occurs when the voice

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<sup>49</sup>Works, "Joy," p. 491.

<sup>50</sup>Works, p. 433.

of Cain is contrasted with the voice of Abel in "Abels blood." Using Cain to represent the murderers of this world, Vaughan likens his voice to "a sea, whose lowd waves cannot sleep," the "urgent sound like unto that / Of many waters" in contrast to the "milde" voice of Abel, "still single heard . . . (Though single voices are but low)." <sup>51</sup>

"Peace," too, manifests the effective use Vaughan makes of the contrast of sound; here, however, the contrast relies more on the connotation of the words and the suggestive power of the image. The Saviour, personified as "Sweet Peace," sits crowned "above noise and danger." He is a sentry "all skilful in the wars," and the reader can almost hear the clamor that the word war suggests, but "Sweet Peace" is also the "one born in a Manger" in the silence of a Bethlehem night. <sup>52</sup> The fused image of the warrior-babe intensifies the contrast between the discordant noise of the world of strife, and the calm peaceful harmony that the Christ child personifies.

In the contrast between the quiet serenity of regenerate man and the noisy clamor of the sinner still pursuing the "applause of dust and clay," another aspect of Vaughan's aural imagery, closely related to the relative quiet of the repentant sinner, becomes apparent. A relative absence of

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<sup>51</sup>Works, p. 523.

<sup>52</sup>Works, p. 430.

sound marks the presence of the Divine Being; God is experienced in quiet solitude.

Silex Scintillans is Vaughan's particular search for the moments that gave life meaning, and it is in the aural images that stress comparative quiet that Vaughan is living again for the benefit of the reader the remembered sudden illumination:

When first I saw true beauty, and thy Joys  
Active as light, and calm without all noise  
Shin'd on my soul, I felt through all my powr's  
Such a rich air of sweets, as Evening shows  
Fand by a gentle gale Convey and breath  
On some parch'd bank, crown'd with a flowrie wreath.<sup>53</sup>

In the dedication of "Of Temperance and Patience" to Sir Charles Egerton (1653), Vaughan invited his friend "to looke upon these Collections," for

you will find them to lead you from the Sun into the shade, from the open Terrace into a private grove, & from the noyse and pompe of this world into a silent and solitary Hermitage.<sup>54</sup>

In his brief moments of quiet contemplation, Vaughan felt closest to God in various ways: while contemplating the green things of the earth or the ordered motion of the heavens, while reading His book, the Bible, while recalling his own childhood, and even while contemplating death. The aural images that stress the comparative absence of sound find their place in each.

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<sup>53</sup>Works, "Mount of Olives," p. 476.

<sup>54</sup>Works, p. 213.

One such aural image combines with the metaphor of the plant in "The seed growing secretly":

Dear, secret Greenness! nurst below  
 Tempests and windes, and winter-nights,  
 Vex not, that but one sees thee grow,  
 That One made all these lesser lights.

. . . . .

Then bless thy secret growth, nor catch  
 At noise, but thrive unseen and dumb;  
 Keep clean, bear fruit, earn life and watch  
 Till the white winged Reapers come!<sup>55</sup>

Another aural image emerges as the poet ponders the orderly movement of the "silent" stars, which he termed "God's shining saints." The silence of those "fair, order'd lights / Whose motion without noise," the poet tells us, reminds him of the "true joys" of immortality.<sup>56</sup> In one such moment of epiphany, these stars formed a "ring of pure and endless light," an eternity "as calm as it was bright."<sup>57</sup> It is not only the moments of darkness but also the moments of silence that become the "souls dumb watch" and the time of "God's silent, searching flight."<sup>58</sup>

Absence of sound frequently finds prominence when the poet writes of "his life's guide," the Bible, as well. The patriarchs of the Old Testament had known that "sacred Calm"

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<sup>55</sup>Works, p. 511.

<sup>56</sup>Works, "The Constellation," p. 469.

<sup>57</sup>Works, "The World," p. 466.

<sup>58</sup>Works, "The Night," p. 522.



in their intimacy with God, and the Mediator in the New Testament walked the "silent paths" to prayer.<sup>59</sup>

Serenity finds a place in the imagery, too, whenever the poet recalls the days of his "innocent" childhood before sin had eclipsed his will and reason. In "The Men of War," he prays for "A sweet, revengeless, quiet minde . . . a heart as milde / And plain, as when I was a childe."<sup>60</sup> To Vaughan, it was in this quiet "white age" of childhood that man was closest to the unfallen state he had in the Garden of Eden. A child could still "spy some shadows of eternity" because he had not as yet begun to obscure the element of natural law implanted in him at birth by God. He had not yet begun the process of attempting, through sin, entirely to ruin this original gift of God. The desire of the penitent soul is to return to that quiet primitive simplicity before exposure to the noisy passions of the adult world.

Complete silence and serenity can be fully achieved, however, only in the death of the Old Adam of sin in each man. Man must put off the fleshly veil of the body much as

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<sup>59</sup>Works, "The Search," p. 405.

<sup>60</sup>Works, p. 516. An analogous thought is found in "The Retreat" (p. 419), Childhood is the time "Before I taught my tongue to wound / My conscience with a sinfull sound"; and in "Childe-hood" (p. 520), "And yet the Practice worldlings call / Checking the poor child for his play." Childhood is an "age of mysteries which he / Must live twice, that would Gods face see."

the silkworm in "Resurrection and Immortality" stirs in "weake, infant hummings" from that long "silent sleep" of death and wings upward towards heaven devoid of its bodily shell.<sup>61</sup> The silence of death is a desired state:

And when in death my speech is spent  
O let that silence then prevail!  
O chase in that cold calm my foes,  
And hear my hearts last private throws!<sup>62</sup>

God's presence is felt in silence. The aural imagery reveals His presence in the quiet of the underground root of the plant, in the noiseless motion of the stars, in the sacred calm of the pages of the Bible, in the quiet mind of the child, and in the ultimate silence of death. Moreover, man must be silent, too, in order to feel this oneness with his Maker, and the aural imagery that has contrasted the sinner with repentant man has all pointed to this conclusion.

It is in the silence of a repentant heart that man can hear God speak to him. Consequently, Vaughan has attributed silence to the tears and grief of repentant man as well. In "Thou that knows't for whom I mourne," the poet praises the affliction of the flesh that has pacified man into a silent receptive state open to the grace of God:

A silent teare can peirce thy throne,  
When lowd Joyes want a wing.  
And sweeter aires streame from a grone,  
Than any arted string.<sup>63</sup>

God hears a "silent teare," signifying the repentance of

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<sup>61</sup>Works, p. 400.

<sup>62</sup>Works, "The Agreement," p. 528.

<sup>63</sup>Works, p. 418.

sins, much better than the "lowd Joyes" of the "arted string."

In "Jesus Weeping," the poet writes that

My business here shall be to grieve:  
A grief that shall outshine all joys  
For mirth and life, yet without noise.  
A grief, whose silent dew shall breed  
Lillies and Myrrhe, where the curs'd seed  
Did sometimes rule. A grief so bright  
'Twill make the Land of darkness light;  
And while too many sadly roam,  
Shall send me (Swan-like) singing home.<sup>64</sup>

Silence, calm, quiet, and peace, then, form a pattern throughout Silex Scintillans that the reader tends to equate with the Divine Presence. In the calm quiet of night undisturbed by the clamor of man's temporal day, God can be experienced. In the quiet contemplation of the Bible and in the memory of innocent childhood, man is able to find that sacred calm undisturbed by the passions of riper years. And in the silence of the death of the body, the ultimate rejection of the flesh, man can fully attain eternal life. The discordant noise of man and the beckoning voice of temptation must be shut out in order that repentant man can be silently receptive to the entry of the redemptive power of grace. Moreover, nature, in its often harmonious response, can prove a guide for man in his relation with God because the creatures of nature reflect their unity with the Source and End of their being.

This, then, has been the poet's personal message of

Silex Scintillans, and his aural imagery has been a significant device in the universal recreation of the attitudes and experiences that comprised Vaughan's spiritual regeneration. The poet, moreover, has employed effective contrast of sound to heighten the meaning implicit in the aural images. The harmonious Divine order of the created world has been contrasted with the often dissonant sounds of earth-centered man and the temptations to which he succumbs. The quiet sorrowing sinner has been contrasted with the noisy unrepentant one; and, finally, the silence which means the presence of God has provided an overall contrast to the many sounds heard in the temporal world.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## AURAL RESPONSE IN THREE REPRESENTATIVE POEMS

In Chapter Three, the aural imagery of Silex Scintillans was surveyed and its contribution to meaning was examined. It is desirable and necessary, however, to see the aural image in context in order to understand fully its importance to the meaning of the entire poem. Therefore, in the present chapter, three poems will be explicated that were chosen for the representative nature of the aural imagery in each: "The Morning-watch," "The Night," and "Regeneration."

Furthermore, the visual images in the three poems under consideration require at least cursory examination, for often they are basic images carrying symbolic meaning essential to the understanding of the poem. However, although a particular visual image is basic to the poem, the meaning of the poem is often dependent upon an accompanying aural image. The flowering plant is one such basic visual image and will prove in two of the following poems a good example of how the poet composes complex image clusters by beginning with a basic image and building upon it in order to convey the meaning he intends.

"The Morning-watch"

O Joyes! Infinite sweetnes! with what flowres,  
 And shoots of glory, my soul breakes, and buds!  
     All the long houres  
     Of night, and Rest  
     Through the still shrouds  
     Of sleep, and Clouds,  
 This Dew fell on my Breast;  
     O how it Blouds,  
 And Spirits all my Earth! heark! In what Rings,  
 And Hymning Circulations the quick world      10  
     Awakes, and sings;  
     The rising winds,  
     And falling springs,  
     Birds, beasts, all things  
 Adore him in their kinds.  
     Thus all is hurl'd  
 In sacred Hymnes, and Order, The great Chime  
 And Symphony of nature. Prayer is  
     The world in tune,  
     A spirit-voyce,      20  
     And vocall joyes  
 Whose Eccho is heav'ns blisse.  
     O let me climbe  
 When I lye down! The pious soul by night  
 Is like a clouded starre, whose beames though sed  
     To shed their light  
     Under some Cloud  
     Yet are above,  
     And shine, and move  
 Beyond that mistle shrowd.      30  
     So in my Bed  
 That Curtain'd grave, though sleep, like ashes, hide  
 My lamp, and life, both shall in thee abide.

"The Morning-watch," with its significantly appropriate devotional title, expresses in essence the delight and the gratitude of the believer in the creation of a new morning;<sup>1</sup> for, behind the exhilarating feeling that accompanies the waking return to consciousness and life communicated in the poem is the sense of spiritual as well as physical renewal, of a literal resurrection with the renewed assurance of the immortality of the soul.

The visual images in the poem are basic ones, reinforcing one another, to represent man's spirit or his soul. The flower, the star, and the lamp are figurative images that by their use in other poems have become symbolic of the soul, the Image of God within man.<sup>2</sup> Here, the beams of the star are obscured by the clouds of mortality, and the light of the lamp is smothered by the ashes of earth. Only the flower has burst through the bounds of the physical plant and bloomed; hence, the plant imagery becomes the primary visual image with the other two simply a reiteration of man's

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. "But mornings, new Creations are," Works, "The Day Spring," p. 663.

<sup>2</sup>The metaphor of the lamp stands for the soul in "The Relapse," (p. 433) in "Silence, and stealth of dayes," (p. 425) and in "The Feast" (p. 534). The metaphor of the star as man's soul is prominent in "Ascension-Hymn," (p. 482) and in "The Bird" (p. 496). The metaphor of the flower as the soul is pervasive but especially prominent in "Unprofitableness," (p. 441) "The Sap," (p. 475), and "The seed growing secretly" (p. 510).

plight while the veil of the flesh still obscures the soul.<sup>3</sup> The visual images, then, reinforce one another to establish the underlying structure of the idea the poet wants to express, but they do not convey the essential meaning of the poem.

The reader's attention is directed to the plant because by blooming it has revealed in a visual image the "Joyes" and the "Infinite sweetnes" of the opening line. Something has happened during the night to cause the flower to bloom, and Vaughan uses an aural image to help express its consequent flowering. In the silence of the "still shrouds of sleep" (ll. 5,6) has come the reviving dew.<sup>4</sup> Because the plant and man are to be treated synonymously, the dew that literally feeds the physical plant figuratively nourishes man's soul as well. It is the same "silent dew" that in "Jesus Weeping" will "breed Lilies and Myrrhe."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it comes when man in sleep or in the death of the physical body has shut out the noises of temporal day and is

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. "But felt through all this fleshly dresse / Bright shootes of everlastingnesse," Works, "The Retreate," p. 419.

<sup>4</sup>Dew is always beneficent in Vaughan; it denotes the influx of the Holy Spirit into the heart, rendering the dry land fruitful. The odd use of "Blouds" in line eight of "The Morning-watch" reflects the close association in the poet's mind between dew as the symbol of God's sanctifying grace and blood as symbolic of His highest gift and ultimate grace in the Incarnation and sacrifice of His son.

<sup>5</sup>Works, p. 503.



passively receptive to the influx of the grace of God.

Once again, under God's cherishing mercy, man has been literally resurrected. The dew that has come in the silence of the night recalls the many times in Vaughan's poetry that comparative absence of sound has been indicative of the Divine Presence. In addition, the poet has stressed man's silent receptivity. It is the "silent tear"<sup>6</sup> of the repentant sinner that is heard by God just as it is the grief "without noise" that "shall outshine all joys / For mirth and life."<sup>7</sup> The ultimate silence occurs, of course, only in the death of the physical body or in the complete obliteration of the sense world of man in silence and in night. The total rejection of temporal existence is a necessary condition for the influx of the Divine dew "that Blouds and Spirits all my Earth" (ll. 8,9).

Vaughan has employed the aural image in the first eight lines not only for the intrinsic meaning it conveys to the reader but to enhance the exultation felt in the sounds of morning revival as opposed to the silence of sleep and death. Night and death have become terribly synonymous here, but with the return of morning and renewal, the poet communicates the joyous affirmation of the soul's immortality.

The phrase, "my Earth" (l. 9) together with "the quick

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<sup>6</sup>Works, "Admission," p. 453.

<sup>7</sup>Works, "Jesus Weeping," p. 503.

world Awakes" (ll. 10,11) sustains the opening theme of life's renewal and introduces the next -- that of nature, inanimate as well as animate, ever intent on its Creator and ever, to the shame of neglectful man, worshipping and adoring Him. As the Divine dew "Blouds and Spirits all my Earth," the poet expresses his desire to be completely fused with the creation that has intrinsic communion with God. Beginning with line 9 and extending through line 22, Vaughan employs an aural image to convey this instinctive response of nature to its Maker.

It is the morning hymn of creation. The "Hymning Circulations" and the singing are the music of the earth, the renewal of life exemplified in the auditory revival of nature. Here, combined to form the morning hymn, are virtually all the sounds of nature that the reader has heard echo throughout Silex Scintillans. The sound of the "falling springs" (l. 13) recalls the "vocal" waters of the murmuring and chiding, calling stream of "The Waterfall," the "confused sounds" of the spring in "Religion," the "frothy noise" of the stream in "The Mutiny" or the wild abandon of the stream in "Misery," but it also recalls the motionless and soundless puddle in "The Dawning." All of the voices of the springs, streams, waterfalls, and fountains that have proclaimed aurally their kinship with their Divine Source are compressed into the sounds of the "falling springs" as they join in the song of praise.

The "rising winds" (l. 12) enter the chorus, and the reader is reminded of the gently stirring breezes that evoked the "whispers" from the leaves of the oak tree and bushes in "Rules and Lessons." They, too, are acquainted with the great "I AM," and have responded in songs of adoration. The sounds of the rising winds are reminiscent as well, however, of the "surly blasts," the destructive forces in nature that are also a part of the prearranged plan. Out of the disorder exemplified by the harsh winds and tempests of temporal life will come the eventual order that God has decreed, for the damaging winds have represented the purification that is often necessary before order can be restored.

Line 14, continuing the aural image, recalls the many times in Silex Scintillans that the birds have responded to God with their "solemn matins" and "early hymns," the eager annunciation of dawn by the cock, or the humming of the silk-worm as it wings upward. Inanimate nature, "all things," has vocally responded as well with the "full hymns" of the field, the singing of the hills and valleys, and the "ringing" woods.

As the introductory "Hymning Circulations" (l. 10) rise to the magnificent crescendo of "the great Chime / And Symphony of nature" (ll. 17,18), the reader is made aware through the impact of the aural image that the whole created world is "in tune" with its Maker. It is the naturalis

musica mundi because nature is one with God. The sounds stress the order and unity of creation in the philosophical sense that has been noted before in the endless cycle of the "vocal" streams. The spring that has "tuned" itself to "early day" has recognized with all of creation the Source and End of its being.

"Prayer is / The world in tune" (ll. 18, 19) suggests an alternative way of regarding the sounds and motions of nature, and prepares the reader for the close of the poem. The "spirit-voyce" (l. 20) and "vocall joyes" (l. 21) are summary phrases of what has gone before, but, significantly, the sounds of nature compressed in the two phrases are but an "Eccho" of "heav'ns blisse" (l. 22). Of and by themselves the sounds are nothing, for they are only echoes from beyond. Their worth lies solely in the intrinsic source that gave being and voice to the whole of creation in order that man might comprehend the Eternal World.

Vaughan employs aural imagery in "The Morning-watch," then, to convey to the reader the exhilaration that man feels in a revival of his conscious mind at daybreak. Man is experiencing the birth of a new day when upon awakening he is greeted with the sounds of harmonious nature: the softly rising winds, the sounds of running water, the melodious song of the birds, and the bustlings of the animals. The awakening is not merely a physical one, however. The

main emphasis has been on spiritual revival, for in the silence of the sleep of the physical body, the Divine dew has awakened man's spirit. It has virtually nourished the soul of the silently receptive man. He can now feel a community of spirit with divinely ordered nature while it expresses the joys and sweetness of its unity with God in the morning hymn of creation. Vaughan has selected sounds from the natural world and effectively combined them in musical terminology to form a harmonious symphony of praise, and, in so doing, the composite aural image, apart from the sensuous delight that it imparts to the reader, is a thoroughly effective device in suggesting concord and order as essentially philosophical terms used here in a basically Christian context.

# "The Night"

John 2.3

Through that pure Virgin-shrine,  
That sacred vail drawn o'r thy glorious noon  
That men might look and live as Glo-worms shine,  
And face the Moon:  
Wise Nicodemus saw such light  
As made him know his God by night.

Most blest believer he!  
Who in that land of darkness and blinde eyes  
Thy long expected healing wings could see,  
When thou didst rise,  
And what can never more be done,  
Did at mid-night speak with the Sun!

10

O who will tell me, where  
He found thee at that dead and silent hour!  
What hallow'd solitary ground did bear  
So rare a flower,  
Within whose sacred leafs did lie  
The fulness of the Deity.

No mercy-seat of gold,  
No dead and dusty Cherub, nor carv'd stone,  
But his own living works did my Lord hold  
And lodge alone;  
Where trees and herbs did watch and peep  
And wonder, while the Jews did sleep.

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Dear night! this worlds defeat;  
The stop to busie fools; cares check and curb;  
The day of Spirits; my souls calm retreat  
Which none disturb!  
Christs\* progress, and his prayer time;  
The hours to which high Heaven doth chime.

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Gods silent, searching flight:  
When my Lords head is fill'd with dew, and all  
His locks are wet with the clear drops of night;  
His still, soft call;  
His knocking time; The souls dumb watch,  
When Spirits their fair kinred catch.

\*Mark, chap. 1.35. S. Luke, chap. 21.37.

Were all my loud, evil days  
Calm and unhaunted as is thy dark Tent,  
Whose peace but by some Angels wing or voice

Is seldom rent;  
Then I in Heaven all the long year  
Would keep, and never wander here.

40

But living where the Sun  
Doth all things wake, and where all mix and tyre  
Themselves and others, I consent and run  
To ev'ry myre,  
And by this worlds ill-guiding light,  
Erre more then I can do by night.

There is in God (some say)  
A deep, but dazzling darkness; As men here  
Say it is late and dusky, because they

50

See not all clear;  
O for that night! where I in him  
Might live invisible and dim.

"The Night," based upon the Biblical story of the revelation granted the Pharisee Nicodemus, expresses in arresting, antithetical imagery the fundamental gospel truth recorded in John 3:3: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Vaughan, exemplifying the fondness of the metaphysical poets for paradox, effectively employs opposing visual and aural imagery to stress this basic message. It is only when man has experienced a regeneration that he can truly see in darkness, and, to confuse the senses for a moment, hear in silence.

The poem is full of contrast, and it would be unjustifiable to diminish the importance of the visual opposition, the paradox of light in darkness that constitutes the main emphasis of the first two stanzas. Christ is the "Sun" that shines at midnight, but he cannot be found, the poet tells us in the meaningful imagery of stanza four, in the "mercy-seat of gold,"<sup>8</sup> nor in the "dead and dusty Cherub, nor carv'd stone."<sup>9</sup> He can be found only in the "living works" (l. 21) of creation, in the "quick world" of nature, which

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. the parallel with the description of Solomon's temple in "The Palm Tree," ll. 10-12, Works, p. 490.

<sup>9</sup>Pettet, p. 146. The "carv'd stone" may refer to the Tables of the Law, "all that e're was writ in stone," "Mans fall, and Recovery," Works, p. 411. The main emphasis here, however, is on the new and living, perhaps the supersession of the Law by the Gospel since Vaughan devotes an entire poem to this theme, "The Law, and the Gospel," Works, p. 465.



in "The Morning-watch" revealed its essential living quality in its aural response to God. Significantly, the poet has again found God in the created world, but instead of witnessing His Presence in the harmonious daylight revival of nature, the poet becomes assured that He can be found in the silence of night.

The poem is essentially a glorification of night, and Vaughan indicates his preference for the "dead and silent" (l. 14) hours of darkness in the epithet he assigns to the opening apostrophe of stanza 5, "Dear night." Beginning with this stanza, there is clearly a shift in the emphasis from the light-dark imagery to another favorite contrast that is found throughout the volume of poetry -- the antithesis of sound and silence.

The paradox of light in darkness that up to stanza 5 has dominated the poem is diminished, and the aural emphasis becomes the predominant theme. The strong alliterations, the short, abrupt cadences, and the pattern of ascending climax of stanza 5 stress the importance of the aural image. Functionally, too, the pattern of the poem has been approaching this climax. The first four stanzas record man's search for God. He cannot be found in Solomon's Temple, nor in the ark of the old covenant. To find Him, man needs only to observe and emulate nature before turning back to self to wait in the quiet of the night for the "still, soft call"

(l. 34) that will come to the silent and attentive heart. Man does not need ritualistic ceremonies, but only a living faith and a real desire.

The poet's particular affinity for the hours of night becomes significantly clear in stanzas 5, 6, and 7. Words like calm, silent, still, soft, and dumb dominate the imagery. Other words indicating the cessation of effort, stop, check, and curb, reinforce the largely denotative ones by their connotation of lack of motion and consequently sound. The emphasis is on silence with just enough contrasting sound, obvious in stanza 7 but intrinsic in the antithetical phrases of stanza 5 ("the stop to busie fools"; "cares check and curb"; "the day of spirits"; "my souls calm retreat which none disturb"), to heighten the emphasis.

This contrasting aural imagery conveys to the reader that the Lord must be sought in the "Dear night" of the "souls calm retreat" from the world's "busie" clamour. The world of daylight with all of its loud, distracting noises must be shut out and replaced by the quiet of a humble, longing heart. The phrase, "loud, evil days" (l. 37) is especially significant. The word loud is the only one in the three stanzas under consideration denoting a distracting noise, and because of its position among opposing adjectives, it achieves emphasis. The poet's correlation of loud and evil to describe his days recalls for the reader the many

times in his poetry that noise and evil have been almost synonymous. Even further, the entire phrase helps unify the poem by its correspondence to the day's "ill-guiding light," (l. 47) by which man can err more than at night, and thus ties the paradox of light in darkness of the opening stanza to the paradox of sound in silence.

It is revealing to compare the aural imagery in "The Night" with analogous images in other poems discussed in Chapter Three. Night is the time for true worship, for then the buzzings of the worldly chorus have subsided. The "flyes of hell" and the "doting lover" cease their distracting noises and quaint music. The beckoning voices of man are hushed at night, and the way is open for the intercourse of spirits. The time of spiritual activity is marked not by the world's false hours of daylight, but by the watches and vigils of night to which "high Heaven" sounds the "chime" (l. 30).

This is the time just before daylight, in darkness and in solitude, that Christ chose to walk the "silent" paths to prayer.<sup>10</sup> This is the quiet that Vaughan had found in reminiscence of the "white age" of childhood before exposure to the "sinful sounds" of maturity. This is the "sacred

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<sup>10</sup>Vaughan's allusion in line 29 of "The Night" to Mark 1:35 and to Luke 21:37 are references to Christ's early rising and praying alone in darkness and seclusion.

calm" that he also found in the thoughts of death. This is the peace that Vaughan had discovered while contemplating the noiseless motions of the stars,<sup>11</sup> that formed for him a calm "ring of pure and endless light" in "The World."

"Gods silent, searching flight"<sup>12</sup> (l. 31) occurs in the "dazzling darkness" (l. 50) of the complete obliteration of the sense world of man, when he can truly see God in darkness and hear him in silence.

"The Night" is a good example of the poet's use of contrasting aural imagery to gain effective emphasis. Throughout the poem words denoting silence dominate the imagery. These are further reinforced by antithetical phrases that in their combination stress cessation of effort and consequently sound. The reader, lulled by the repetitious absence of noise, is made more acutely aware of the silence by the abrupt insertion of the one distracting sound the poet uses to describe his evil days. From this point to the end of the poem, the reader will correlate loud with evil days and silence with the mystery of the divine

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<sup>11</sup>In "White Sunday," the poet describes the star as silent, "And yet, as in nights gloomy page / One silent star may interline," Works, p. 486.

<sup>12</sup>Cr. the visual imagery of stanza 6 with The Song of Solomon 5:2, "I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night."

visitation that comes in the tranquil hours of night.

Vaughan has thus achieved the glorification of night as a time when man can witness the transcendent God revealed in the last stanza; the aural imagery has been a significant device in his technique.

# "Regeneration"

A Ward, and still in bonds, one day  
     I stole abroad,  
 It was high-spring, and all the way  
     Primros'd, and hung with shade;  
     Yet, was it frost within,  
     And surly winds  
 Blasted my infant buds, and sinne  
     Like Clouds ecclips'd my mind.

Storm'd thus; I straight perceiv'd my spring  
     Meere stage, and show, 10  
 My walke a monstrous, mountain'd thing  
     Rough-cast with Rocks, and snow;  
     And as a Pilgrims Eye  
     Far from reliefe,  
 Measures the melancholy skye  
     Then drops, and rains for grieve,

So sigh'd I upwards still, at last  
     'Twixt steps, and falls  
 I reach'd the pinnacle, where plac'd  
     I found a paire of scales, 20  
     I tooke them up and layd  
     In th' one late paines,  
 The other smoake, and pleasures weigh'd  
     But prov'd the heavier graines;

With that, some cryed, Away; straight I  
     Obey'd, and led  
 Full East, a faire, fresh field could spy  
     Some call'd it, Jacobs Bed;  
     A Virgin-soile, which no  
     Rude feet ere trod, 30  
 Where (since he stept there,) only go  
     Prophets, and friends of God.

Here, I repos'd; but scarce well set,  
     A grove descryed  
 Of stately height, whose branches met  
     And mixt on every side;  
     I entred, and once in  
     (Amaz'd to see 't,)  
 Found all was chang'd, and a new spring  
     Did all my senses greet; 40

The unthrift Sunne shot vitall gold  
                   A thousand peeces,  
 And heaven its azure did unfold  
                   Checqu'r'd with snowie fleeces,  
                   The aire was all in spice  
                   And every bush  
 A garland wore; Thus fed my Eyes  
                   But all the Eare lay hush.

Only a little Fountain lent  
                   Some use for Eares,  
 And on the dumbe shades language spent  
                   The Musick of her teares;  
                   I drew her neere, and found  
                   The Cisterne full  
 Of divers stones, some bright, and round  
                   Others ill-shap'd, and dull.

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The first (pray marke,) as quick as light  
                   Danc'd through the fload,  
 But, th' last more heavy then the night  
                   Nail'd to the Center stood;  
                   I wonder'd much, but tyr'd  
                   At last with thought,  
 My restless Eye that still desir'd  
                   As strange an object brought;

60

It was a banke of flowers, where I descried  
                   (Though 'twas mid-day,)  
 Some fast asleepe, others broad-eyed  
                   And taking in the Ray,  
                   Here musing long, I heard  
                   A rushing wind  
 Which still increas'd, but whence it stirr'd  
                   No where I could not find;

70

I turn'd me round, and to each shade  
                   Dispatch'd an Eye,  
 To see, if any leafe had made  
                   Least motion, or Reply,  
                   But while I listning sought  
                   My mind to ease  
 By knowing, where 'twas, or where not,  
                   It whisper'd; Where I please.

80

Lord, then said I, On me one breath,  
And let me dye before my death!

Cant. Cap. 5. ver. 17.

Arise O North, and come thou South-wind, and blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.

"Regeneration" stands in significant position as the opening poem of Silex Scintillans and embodies in poetic record Vaughan's discovery of religious faith. The poem depicts, in a visionary journey, all the stages of his spiritual life and ends with a supplication for a rebirth in God. The setting is primarily visual, and the poet has made it so for a reason. The aural imagery achieves more in this poem in its subordination to the visual imagery than it could have had the aural been the predominant imagery.

Significantly, the journey begins in "high-spring" (l. 3) when the natural world would be at the height of its sensuous beauty. Symbolically, the poet was at the peak of his carnal external spring of youth and enjoyed pleasure, too, because he had not as yet experienced the awakening and consequent conversion.<sup>13</sup>

To reflect the high delight of youth for the external pleasures of the flesh, Vaughan chose his images precisely for their outward sensuous beauty. The final emphasis, however, will not stress this sensuous beauty but rather the inner revelation that is afforded. By means of the contrasting visual imagery in stanzas 1 and 2, the poet depicts the inward state of man in opposing terms of desolation. Instead

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<sup>13</sup>Durr, p. 82. Man is a "ward" (l. 1) to sin because he lives in "thralldom" under the control of the world, the flesh, and the devil.



of spring, it is winter. Instead of walking a "Primros'd" path, man is treading a way "rough-cast with Rocks, and snow." The inward realization of the opposition of his external and internal state is absolutely necessary to man's salvation, and the poet chose an aural image to reveal what was in his thinking a preliminary step in man's awakening to the "meere stage, and show" (l. 10) of externalities -- the necessity of suffering.

Vaughan often in his poetry identified himself with the plant, and he does so here as the visual budding plant becomes again the underlying structure upon which his aural image will work. The budding plant, or the maturing spirit of man, is "blasted"<sup>14</sup> by "surly winds" (l. 6). The frosty winds that perniciously blow upon the infant buds represent the storms and buffetings of temporal life that undermine man's spirit. Vaughan was acutely aware of the mental anguish he had suffered in the death of his brother and close friends and of the bitter disappointment that he had experienced in the defeat of his political and religious hopes. However, he was also cognizant of the fact that it was this same bitter mental and physical anguish that was the instrumental force in his own awakening and consequent religious

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<sup>14</sup>The Oxford English Dictionary defines blasted as "Balefully or perniciously blown upon" by a "parching wind," "blighted" or "stricken by a supernatural agency." Any of these definitions would fit Vaughan's image.

conversion.<sup>15</sup>

In "Mans fall, and Recovery" and in "Unprofitableness," the poet had employed this same aural image of the "surly" and "snarling" winds' damage to the visible plant, but the affliction had been necessary if the flower were to open to the healing influence of the "Sun"<sup>16</sup> again, just as the storm that blew and rained on the bird had been instrumental in evoking its response to God in "early hymns."

As man's spirit was at first from the breath, the Spirit of God, so here the storm opens the way for the second birth, for it represents the sharp blows sometimes necessary to the spirit's awakening. It is this harsh breath of God that blows out all the false lights of the conceptualizing mind in order to reveal Reality, to help man perceive the "meere stage and show" of his illusory carnal spring.

Once this self-knowledge has been comprehended man will not rest until he has scaled the imaginary mountain (stanza 3). The Christian soul must first overcome its desire for worldly things. The ascent of the mountain is the active

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<sup>15</sup>My (l. 7) identifies the infant buds as a metaphorical representation of the poet's own spirit. Vaughan's poetry is experiential; however, the experience of universal man is understood.

<sup>16</sup>Sun is usually capitalized and frequently italicized in Vaughan's poetry to confirm its analogy to the Son of Righteousness. The poet often used italics to emphasize his allusions.

way, for it is the effort of the will to free the soul from distraction. But once the pinnacle has been achieved, the repentant sinner can no longer rely on his own active effort. His own repentance is not, of itself, enough to free him.<sup>17</sup>

In stanzas 4, 5, and 6, the poet is afforded a revelation of God in the grove as he is directed toward the East, traditionally symbolic in the Old Testament of illumination and light. It is a delightful revelation that feeds the eye in the exquisite visual imagery of stanza 6. The verdant garden grove<sup>18</sup> with its flowering bushes fed by the "vitall gold" of the sun and "Checqu'r'd with snowie fleeces" (l. 44), represents quite simply the beauty of religion. The poet has entered the "faire, fresh field" (l. 27) of Divine Communion. It is "Virgin-soile" (l. 29), and its sweet-smelling air is reminiscent of the traditional association in Christian literature of sweet odors and the presence of the Divinity. The poet has found the "new spring"

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<sup>17</sup>Garner, p. 55-58. Garner records that "Regeneration" corresponds to the three stages of the Christian experience: the first two, purgation and illumination, represent the active way; the third step, perfection, represents the passive way or the cessation of man's efforts.

<sup>18</sup>There is a close association in Vaughan's poetry between groves and religious experience. In "Religion," the poet writes: "My God, when I walk in those groves / And leaves, Thy spirit doth still fan, / I see in each shade that there grows / An angel talking with a man," Works, p. 404; and in "Corruption," he mentions that "Paradise lay in some green shade," Works, p. 440.

(l. 39) of his search.<sup>19</sup>

All of the pilgrim's senses are satisfied in the garden grove. All, that is, significantly, but one -- "all the Eare lay hush" (l. 48). The reader's attention is thus directed to the aural imagery in stanza 7 because sound has been notably absent from the sensuous description of the garden. The "Musick" (l. 52) of the tears of the fountain is the only sound in this silent, secret spot. The sound of the dripping fountain Vaughan describes appropriately as music, for the fountain is Christ, the font of our scriptural baptism, who, in His Incarnation, is the man of sorrows weeping with tears of grief and pity for the blind sinfulness of man.<sup>20</sup> All is quiet except for the music of the fountain. Throughout his poetry Vaughan has stressed the significance of the absence of noise when in the Divine Presence.

The poet has learned much on his allegorical journey.

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<sup>19</sup>The Bible verse that Vaughan has appended to "Regeneration" directs the reader to the Song of Solomon 4:16, but beginning with verse 12 and continuing through verse 16 of the same chapter, is found the paradisaal garden with its rich sensuous description that the poet depicts in the garden grove.

<sup>20</sup>In the two "Jesus Weeping" poems of Silex Scintillans, these tears are described: "Dear Jesus weep on! pour this latter soul-quickning rain, this living water / On their dead hearts," Works, p. 502; "O healing tears, tears of love," Works, p. 503.

Now, within the communion of saints, he will comprehend more. The flowers of the bank (stanza 9) serve the same purpose as the stones in the cistern (stanza 7,8). Some of them are accessible to the ray of life; some are not.<sup>21</sup>

His "restless Eye that still desir'd" (l. 63) indicates that the poet is yet unsatisfied in his quest for God. Clearly, he has a step farther to go on his path towards salvation; he is waiting quietly ("listning sought my mind to ease")<sup>22</sup> for the glad tidings. As the questing poet stands in the midst of the revelation of the grove that has fed and satisfied the other senses, he suddenly hears the "rushing wind" (l. 70).

This aural image is the focal point of the entire poem. The visual imagery that has dominated the poem has all pointed to this conspicuous aural image. The outward beauty of the carnal spring was not enough to satisfy the inner, questing man. It was the inner realization of man's divided state that was the important factor in his awakening. Even the outward beauty of religious communion, the "new spring,"

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<sup>21</sup>The notion of sleep as representing spiritual blindness is an exegetical commonplace. Some of the flowers are fast asleep "Though 'twas mid-day" (l. 66).

<sup>22</sup>Ll. 77,78. Cf. "Why with so much dotage do we fixe our Eyes upon the deceitfull lookes of temporal things? . . . Is it the Eye alone that wee live by? Is there nothing usefull about us but that wanderer? We live also by the eare, and at that Inlet wee receive the glad tydings of Salvation," "The World Contemned," Works, p. 326.

is not enough. His religion must satisfy the heart of man. The faith revealed to the eye and the other senses in the garden grove or in all of nature is not enough. Man can find regeneration only in the quiet of the listening heart passively receptive to the influx of the Holy Spirit. The rushing wind of stanza 9 can be none other than the Pentecostal wind of Acts 2:2, "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind . . . and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost."

Vaughan attempts no rational explanation of the mystery. The Christian can only submit to the will and purpose of God, to the divine breath that whispers, "Where I please" (l. 80), the wind that Jesus symbolically uses when trying to explain to the Pharisee Nicodemus what it means to be born again:

Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. (John 3:7-8)

"The Morning-watch," "The Night," and "Regeneration"<sup>23</sup> combine to illustrate the contribution of the aural imagery found throughout Silex Scintillans, and to confirm the

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<sup>23</sup>Although the synthesis is my own, I am indebted for my understanding of the three poems to five authors in particular: R. A. Durr, On the Mystical Poetry of Henry Vaughan; Ross Garner, Henry Vaughan: Experience and the Tradition; E. C. Pettet, Of Paradise and Light; Fern Farnham, "The Imagery of Henry Vaughan's 'The Night'," PQ XXXVIII (October, 1959), 425-435; and B. T. Stewart, "Hermetic Symbolism in 'The Night'," PQ XXIX (October, 1950), 417-422.

necessity of an understanding of this imagery for the comprehension of the full meaning of Vaughan's spiritual experience. "Regeneration" presents in miniature the spiritual journey of the soul of man that has been glimpsed throughout the volume in the many images from nature through which Vaughan chooses to relate his experience. As the poet tries to present the experience of sudden illumination, the moments that gave life meaning, he turns to question external nature, and the creatures respond as they did in "The Morning-watch," filling the whole created earth with their message of oneness with their Maker. Their voices are harmonious, the music of earth, and the poet contrasts their response with that of willful man. He finds man's voice loud and distracting, the voice of his own "loud, evil days." Resolving to shut out these noises of temporal existence, the poet welcomes a retreat to the silence that he equates with the Divine Presence, because it is in this silent and solitary garden grove like the one in "Regeneration" that he can respond to the breath of God. God does not hear the loud voice, only the silent tear and the silent grief of the anguished sinner.

In the allegorical search recorded in Silex Scintillans, the poet has been not only looking but listening for a revelation of God. Questioning external nature, he hears the morning hymn of Creation and knows that in the intrinsic



responsive voice of the creatures echoes of the Eternal World are heard. Contrasting their response with the often dissonant voice that emanates from the world of man, the poet resolves to shut out the distraction, for it is only in the quiet of a listening heart that he can hear God speak to him. It is only in this precious silence that the nearness of the Divine Being can be experienced.

In the poet's quest for God, then, a pattern of response emerges, and it is the aural images that record this response. The response of nature to God is orderly and harmonious; the response of unregenerate man to God is discordant; the response of repentant man to God is in silent receptivity; and, finally, God responds to the quiet repentance of the sinner.



## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Such, then, is the role of aural imagery in Silex Scintillans, the poetic record of Henry Vaughan's spiritual regeneration. Basically, in order to convey in the universal terms of poetry the intangible feelings involved in a religious experience, a concrete counter of experience between the poet and the reader is necessary. Hence, the image becomes the vehicle through which the poet is able to recreate and communicate his individual vision. Moreover, the image in a poem that expresses religious feeling has its genesis in both the poet's particular personal experience and in the tradition of religious thought out of which that experience grows. The genuineness of religious assent depends not on the person's theology but on his experience. Nonetheless, his theology -- a rational system of ideas -- is a necessary antecedent.

For Henry Vaughan, the environmental influence of the Welsh countryside became an important factor in developing the keen awareness and appreciation for the created world of nature that underlies much of his imagery. The impressionable years of his youth spent in London added their influence by contributing to the poet's disillusionment with the willful world of man. This, too, is reflected in his aural imagery. Moreover, the poet's imagery was influenced to a great extent by the Neo-Platonic tradition that

saw the natural world as a reflection of the unseen and by the Augustinian distrust of the reason that insisted on the reality of faith in experience.

Thus, after the poet's spiritual conversion, his personal affinity for nature and his distaste for the instability of man were easily translated into the spiritual metaphor and symbol of his poetry. Unlike his self-acknowledged master, George Herbert, who relied heavily on visual emblematic images, Vaughan depended upon the greater interpretive power of the poetic symbol. His technique involved using basic visual and aural images and interweaving the two until he had explored their full significance and achieved the meaning he wanted their symbolism to convey.

The aural image, therefore, had an important meaning to contribute to the total impact of Silex Scintillans, and it is in the aural response of Vaughan's world of Christian opposites that the reader finds the underlying significance of the aural image. Nature responds to its Maker because it is unified with the source of its being. The streams and springs, the hills, valleys and groves, the flowering plants as well as the creatures that are normally endowed with voice, especially the birds, aurally announce their absorption into their God. Their hymns of praise, adoration, and longing heard throughout the volume rise to the harmonious symphony of creation recorded in the aural imagery

of "The Morning-watch."

The response of willful man to God is revealed in the aural imagery as well; by contrast to nature's inherently harmonious response, his response is often discordant because he would rather follow the noisy beckonings of the flesh, the world, and the devil. Man responds instead to the sounds of the willful self, the temptations within and without that are recorded in the aural images of his world.

Not all men follow this contrary way of the flesh, however, and Vaughan was one such man who sought to follow the path to God. This quiet way of the repentant, sorrowing sinner is also revealed in the aural imagery.

The aural imagery has been a significant device, then, in conveying the poet's basic message: Man can find the answer to his predicament, when, after observing God's plan and purpose in the intrinsic response of nature, he suppresses the sounds of the willful self to become the silent receptacle of the grace of God.

Moreover, the contrasts in the aural imagery that Vaughan employs serve to heighten the effect of its meaning and, thus, enhance the poetry. The harmonious response of nature is contrasted with the dissonant response of man. The loud and distracting voice of unregenerate man is contrasted with the quiet sorrow of repentant man, and the

silence that proclaims the divine way stands in effective contrast to all of the sounds heard in the temporal world.

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